

THE COLUMBIA DETECTIVE'S GREAT CASE!

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CHICAGO CHARLIE'S DIAMOND HAUL.

BY LIEUT. A. K. SIMS.



"IT'S A CASE OF SUICIDE!" THE DOCTOR DECLARED, SNIFFING AT THE BOTTLE. "THE MAN HAS BEEN DEAD FOR HOURS!"

Chicago Charlie's Diamond Dash:

OR,

Trapping the Tunnel Thieves.

A Story of the White City.

BY LIEUT. A. K. SIMS,

AUTHOR OF "CHICAGO CHARLIE, THE COLUMBIAN DETECTIVE," "THE WIZARD KING DETECTIVE," "SINGER SAM, THE PILGRIM DETECTIVE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

ZULUS AND ASSAGAIS.

A BIG *kriäl* from the heart of South Africa seemed to have been dumped into the cars of the Illinois Central. Such another scene as those cars presented has probably never been witnessed in this country. Flying through the night, at the rate of forty miles an hour, were more than a hundred of the fierce Zulu warriors who made themselves so famous a few years ago in battle against the English, under their king, Cetewayo. In that war, history was written; and the proud young Prince Imperial, the heir presumptive to the lost throne of the Napoleons, forfeited his life to the stabbing assagais of these fighting blacks.

It may be that among the hundred or more warriors gathered in the speeding train there were even some who helped to shed the life-blood of the young prince. It is pretty certain, at least, that more than one of them was engaged in that bitter and hopeless struggle against the English; for this picture of the Zulus on the train is no fancy sketch, drawn from the author's imagination. They were there, three cars of them, on their way to the great World's Fair at Chicago, as fast as steam could carry them.

For the most part the Zulus were asleep. Muscular limbs of light ebony swung and dangled here and there over the cushions of the seats. Gourd calabashes rattled against the walls; and the heads and poles of assagais gleamed barbarically under the low-turned lamps.

But though the Zulus were sleeping, they were not at rest. The motion of the cars disturbed them. Besides, they had lain down in the very worst of tempers. Some light-fingered individual, with an inclination for curios, had stolen an assagai and a calabash. Had stolen the calabash and assagai of Nijujo; who considered himself as important an individual as ever came out of Zululand, with of course the single exception of Cetewayo, the king. That any dog of a white man should thus dare to lay thievish fingers on Zulu property was a thing not to be condoned. Hence, the mental disturbance with which the South African warriors had betaken themselves to sleep, and to dreams.

There was an individual in one of the cars who was not a Zulu, nor a black. He had evidently wandered in there by mistake, though he seemed to be very little disturbed by his surroundings.

He was a countryman of the 'way-back variety, one who seemed to have traveled little, and probably he expected to find queer things in a railway train. He picked up one of the nearest assagais and examined it curiously, running his fingers over its keen point.

Then he looked at the sleeping blacks.

"Tarnation queer tools, them niggers is a-carryin'!" was his muttered exclamation. "And queer-lookin' niggers, too! I reckon they must be shippin' them to Chicago for waiters in the hotels.—My! wouldn't that be a fine thing to gig fish with?"

He stabbed the air with the point of the assagai.

It was an unfortunate movement, for, as he drew the weapon back the shaft caught against a calabash, and pulled it from the wall.

The calabash fell into the center of the aisle with a rattling bump, drawing after it a string of jingling beads.

In a twinkling down came the ebony legs that had been resting on the cushions, while a score of savage faces came up at the same moment; and angry eyes glared in the direction of the noise.

The countryman was startled by the transformation, but he kept his seat and retained his grip on the assagai.

"If I hadn't seen so many niggers in my time, I don't know but I'd be scairt," he commented, speaking aloud, and returning the fierce looks with interest. "'Pears like they want to eat me!"

He was not given time for further speech.

A series of angry roars bellowed through the car, and several of the blacks caught up their assagais and leaped into the aisle.

Every Zulu in the car awoke, and the confused Babel of cries and exclamations became appalling.

The countryman had roused a hornets' nest.

He could not understand the purport of the exclamations and calls, but the manner of the Zulus showed that they thought him another thief, caught red-handed in the act. He had no business in that car, and the assagai in his hand furnished ample evidence.

The threatening attitude of the Zulus, to say nothing of their howls and screams, informed the countryman of his peril. But, however ignorant he might have been of its cause, he was plainly not a coward.

Still clinging to the assagai and swinging it threateningly, he scrambled up out of the seat and retreated toward the door.

The dull light of the lamp now revealed him fully, showing a round, moon-shaped face, with a fringe of straggling grayish beard extending under his chin from ear to ear.

"I 'low I'll have to gig one o' you fellers, if you crowd me!" was his warning exclamation, as he lifted the strange weapon. "By mighty, I'd hate to do it! But, I'll jist *have* to. Uncle Steve hain't to say gifted in the fightin' line, but he can generally take keer o' hisself in a pinch."

The Zulus understood him no more than he did them, but his attitude told them he meant to resist; and seeing that he was near the door they naturally thought he meant to bolt with the weapon.

The affair was brought to a sudden crisis. One of the blacks, balancing himself unsteadily because of the shaking of the train, launched his assagai at the head of the countryman.

It flew wild, and striking in the wall near the stove, hung there quivering.

At the same instant the door of the car was pushed violently open, and the conductor and a brakeman forced their way in. A number of excited men were at their heels; among them the gentleman who had the Zulus in charge.

The unearthly cries from the Zulu car were the cause of their appearance.

The conductor took in the situation at a glance and dodged back as if in fear of the brandished assagais. At the same time he caught the countryman by the collar and drew him through the open door to the platform.

An assagai shivered the glass of the door, which had been hastily closed, and a pandemonium of yells resounded.

"What in thunder do you mean by going in there?" the conductor growled, shaking the rustic until the latter's teeth fell to chattering. "You come within an inch of getting killed. Didn't you know that was one of the Zulu cars?"

The agent of the Zulu colony had pressed into the car, and was now doing his utmost to quiet the excited blacks.

The conductor shoved the countryman before him into the next car, the crowd following curiously.

"I thought it was a *passenger* car!" the countryman protested, in reply to the conductor's last query.

"They're man-eating blacks from the wilds of Africa, and it's a wonder you're alive! If you'd stayed in there two minutes longer they'd have been picking the flesh off your bones."

The countryman's jaw fell.

"Now, pass up that spear, so it can be given back to them; and thank your stars that you ain't dead."

The conductor was guying the rustic a little, to pay the latter for the trouble that had been caused, though the danger had been real enough, to all seeming, to make it unnecessary to add to its terrors.

"Man-eatin' niggers frum Afriky? Jerusalem!"

The countryman sunk limply into a seat, and mopped his brow with a big red handkerchief.

"Man-eatin' niggers! Well, may I be squashed!"

"What's your name?" questioned the conductor, taking out his pencil and tablet. "We may have some trouble over this thing, and I'll just take your name. Let me see your ticket, too!"

"Stephen Mayfield, frum Jimtown, North Dakoty!" replied the countryman, hunting through his pockets for the desired ticket.

"My! but won't the boys up there have it on Uncle Steve, when they hear of this? Man-eatin' niggers frum Afriky! 'Um!"

He pushed up the ticket for the conductor's inspection.

"Uncle Steve, they allus call me!" the rustic explained. "Been down the road a-ways a-seein' some relatives. Goin' up to see the World's Fair. Got a big show up there, they tell me! 'Um! 'Um! Zulus! Man-eatin' Niggers! Afriky! May I be squashed!"

CHAPTER II.

SUICIDE, OR MURDER.

In one of the big buildings of the Columbian Exposition an excited and curious throng was gathered, though the hour was so early that few visitors had as yet entered the grounds. The craning, whispering crowd consisted chiefly of exhibitors and their employees, with a sprinkling of Columbian guards and guides.

Just what the trouble was was not definitely known, though the idea prevailed that the great diamond exhibit of David Davenish & Co. had suffered by burglary.

Some difficulty was found in forcing the door of the room that held the safe where the trays of diamonds were kept when not on exhibition. When under the eye of the public, they were also always under the eye of a watchman.

An officer, dressed in citizen's clothes, who proved to be none other than Chicago Charlie, the well-known Columbian Detective, pushed forward through the crowd, prepared with keys and appliances for opening the door.

He was accompanied by a queer-looking man of rural aspect, and this queer-looking man was Uncle Steve Mayfield, whose experience with the Zulus on the train of the Illinois Central Railway, but two nights before, has been related.

"Stand back, please," the Columbian Detective requested, fitting a skeleton key to the obdurate lock. "These two guards will accompany us inside while we ascertain what has happened here. The rest of you are earnestly urged to keep out."

Steve Mayfield looked the crowd over with suspicious glance. Although he had been in Chicago only two days, he seemed to have formed already a poor opinion of Chicago crowds. They had been inclined to treat him with levity, and once a bunco steerer had striven to entangle him in his toils.

The door turned on its hinges, under the manipulations of Chicago Charlie, and the countryman and the detective passed inside, accompanied by the two Columbian guards.

What they beheld drew an exclamation of astonishment and pain from the lips of Mayfield.

There had not only been burglary, but apparently there had been murder.

The diamond room was elegantly fitted up in the style of an office, but the glances of the men did not rest on the furnishings. On the floor, as if he had fallen there from the lounge, lay a man, who was to all appearances dead.

"Keep mum about this, and manage in some way to get the crowd to leave!" ordered Chicago Charlie, turning to the guards. "We might have expected something of this kind! I guess it's a case of murder."

The door had been closed, holding the people at bay outside; and the detective pressed it to, after the retreating guards, so that no one might see the form on the floor.

He then telephoned the nearest police station, and summoned a physician from one of the hospitals in the grounds.

The countryman, whose right in the room

was recognized by Chicago Charlie, had dropped down by the man on the floor.

"Oh, Sid, sid!" he exclaimed, while the tears came into his eyes. "You are the best and whitest man in Chicago, an' your old uncle hadn't hardly more'n got to see ye. An' now you're dead!"

There was a bottle on the floor, lying just beyond reach of the dead man's hand, where it seemed to have rolled.

Chicago Charlie took possession of it, saw that it was half-full of some drug; then thrust it into his pocket and turned toward the recumbent form.

"Perhaps it's suicide, instead of murder—that is if the man is dead!" was his thought, as he stepped to place his hand on the wrist. It was pulseless and cold, and not the faintest heartbeat could be detected.

There could be no question that Sidney Mayfield was dead.

"Where did you see your nephew last?" Chicago Charlie questioned. "I guess there's no doubt that he's dead. And it's a pity, too, for I've understood he was a fine gentleman."

"A cuss on this Chicago, an' all the people in it! I ain't struck nothin' but worrit and trouble since comin' hyer!" Uncle Steve Mayfield ejaculated, looking with sober countenance at the dead face. "This'll bodaciously be the killin' of that sister of his'n. It jist will! I swow I don't know as I can ever bear to look her in the face again. When a womern gits to cryin' an' a-weepin' I want to take to the wheat field!"

"Where did you say you saw your nephew last?"

"At his house yisterday at noon. I took dinner with 'em. An' he was as gay an' as chipper as a sparrer. Somebody's murdered Sid, I tell ye! Nobody with suicide in his head could 'a' laughed as he did, and 'a' played the pranks 'at he did, yisterday. It's a straight case o' murder. What kind o' truck is in that bottle?"

Chicago Charlie took the bottle from his pocket and held it up for inspection. He did not doubt it was some poisonous substance, though he was not sufficiently well versed in drugs to determine its character.

"It looks like murder, as you say! Yet it seems strange that any one would undertake to do the job in that way. When a bottle of poison is found by the dead man's side, we naturally think it a case of suicide."

The Columbian guards were apparently having a difficult time with the people outside, for their voices, raised in admonition and anger, came plainly to the detective and Uncle Steve Mayfield.

Then there was a tap on the door; and, when Chicago Charlie opened it, there entered the physician who had been summoned.

"The man is dead, without any doubt, I think," said Chicago Charlie. "This is what we found by him. I take it to be poison."

The doctor took the bottle and advanced, and stood for a moment looking down at the body. Then he knelt and made a hasty examination.

"It's a case of suicide!" the doctor declared, sniffing at the bottle. "The man has been dead for hours. In fact, I don't think he could have lived ten minutes after he took the stuff. This is a most violent poison, and there is still enough in the bottle to kill a regiment of men."

"There will probably have to be a *post-mortem*," said the detective. "If you please, doctor, you may keep the bottle, and subject a portion of its contents to an analysis. The poison in the bottle should correspond with that found in the stomach."

There was another tap on the door, and when Chicago Charlie opened it again there came in three policemen.

"Just in time," he asserted. "I haven't made a search of the room, yet. I wanted you to help me with that. Not a thing has been touched since we came in, excepting of course, the body. Doctor Seacroft has been examining that, and pronounces it a case of suicide. If he is correct, we shall find everything here probably as it should be. There was a rumor outside of a burglary."

Doctor Seacroft and Stephen Mayfield were conferring, and Chicago Charlie began

an immediate search of the premises, accompanied by the police officers he had summoned.

The worst rumors were fully verified.

A gigantic robbery had been committed. More than a hundred thousand dollars' worth of diamonds were missing; the number gone and their value being stated by a member of the firm of Davenish & Co., who had entered almost at the heels of the policemen.

This member of the Davenish firm, while bewildered and astounded by the magnitude of the loss, was more bewildered and astounded by the manner in which the theft seemed to have been committed.

In fact, the whole thing assumed a mysterious air.

The diamonds had been taken from trays that had not been placed in the vault. It was the custom of the Davenish Company to securely lock their jewels in this vault every night, and then leave a man in the room throughout the night as a watchman.

Since the opening of their exhibit at the Fair this duty had been performed by Sidney Mayfield, a most trusted employee, who had taken the diamonds from the clerks, who had charge of them during the hours of the exhibition, and had nightly placed them in this vault.

Not only that, he had watched over them during the hours of darkness, and had returned them every morning into the hands of the proper parties, with never a gem missing.

Now, it was plain that on the night of his death he had not even placed the trays in the vault; but had left them on a table, where they were now found, rifled of their precious contents. The vault had not been tampered with; at least, that was the judgment of the men who made the examination.

When opened, now, more than a fourth of the jewels of the Davenish firm were found to be gone! It was a stunning loss.

And still the question remained: Was this a case of suicide, or of murder?

CHAPTER III.

TRIFLES LIGHT AS AIR.

CHICAGO CHARLIE was confessedly puzzled. The surface evidences all pointed to suicide. But, there were so many proofs against this theory that it seemed not worth while to entertain it.

In the first place Sidney Mayfield was the last man in the world to have committed the crime of self-murder. Chicago Charlie knew something of Mayfield—not much, it is true, but enough to tell him that, Sidney Mayfield had been a light-hearted man, and unusually care-free. He was a man of some prominence, highly respected, of considerable wealth, and of sterling honesty. Not a shadow had ever stained his good name. This is not the kind of man that commits suicide.

A little investigation would settle the question of whether any love affair could possibly have led to such a deed. But, until that had been made, the Columbian Detective felt he must discard the suicide theory.

There was nothing more to be done but to await the result of the *post-mortem*. He was not an intimate acquaintance of the Mayfields; so he left Uncle Steve Mayfield to break the news to the dead man's sister in as gentle a manner as might be possible.

The *post-mortem* examination, held by the learned surgeons who were called on to make it, was in itself interesting only to medical men. Chicago Charlie was present, though, to be sure that a *post-mortem* examination was really held.

He recalled how John Malcomb had been to all appearances dead as men ever get to be, and how the same John Malcomb was not dead at all. So he was resolved to know for himself, without the shadow of a doubt, that Sidney Mayfield was dead. And this was made plainly apparent, even to his skeptical mind.

Yes, Sidney Mayfield was dead; though how he had come to his death was not so clear. He had been poisoned; but whether that poison had been self-administered or given by another could not be so readily determined.

Stella Mayfield, the dead man's sister—a good-looking girl of twenty—hurried to the

room where the body had been placed, supported and comforted by Uncle Steve Mayfield, the relative from the Dakota plains.

Chicago Charlie recalled how John Malcomb's daughter—who was now Chicago Charlie's wife—had been suspected of murdering her own father; and he looked keenly at this girl, as she was conducted into the room.

He started in subdued amazement. The bottle containing the poison was on a table within easy reach of the hands of one of the surgeons. Stella Mayfield saw this bottle, and as her eyes fell on it her face whitened and a spasm of pain distorted her lips.

To any other but a trained reader of faces, the thing would have gone unobserved, or been disregarded. It was a trifle, light as air, perhaps; but of such trifles are made the judgments of the men who are detectives in the truest sense. They observe what others fail to see, and are often able to analyze thoughts, feelings and emotions by a glance at the face of a suspected person.

Though Chicago Charlie saw and was astounded by the look of the girl, yet he was loth to attribute guilty knowledge to her, recalling how his wife had been so wrongly suspected during the days of their courtship.*

The physicians gave it as their opinion, based on the examination made, that Sidney Mayfield had come to his death by poison administered by his own hand.

But to return to Stella Mayfield's visit.

Her overflowing grief was something to touch the most stubborn heart. Even Uncle Steve Mayfield, who, until his visit to Chicago, had been practically a stranger to Stella and her brother, was so wrought on by her manifestations of woe that he sobbed aloud and applied the big red handkerchief with nervous energy.

Chicago Charlie was not the man to stand unmoved in the presence of real grief, but he questioned if this were real grief on the part of Stella Mayfield. If simulated, it was very well done indeed. No queen of the tragedy stage could have done better.

In spite of his distrust, he resolved to form no theory until there were more abundant proofs against her. He was glad that Uncle Steve Mayfield was in the city to assist and comfort her in this hour of distress; for Stella Mayfield was alone in the world, since the death of her brother Sidney.

The Columbian Detective had caught at a chance to question Stephen Mayfield about these city relatives. They were the children of Stephen Mayfield's brother; but, though he had had a number of letters from them, he had never seen either of them before coming to Chicago. His Western home was too distant to permit of visits.

"You see," he had explained, "I have been livin' out there in Dakoty a long time, a-keepin' bach' in my dug-out, a good 'eal like a badger in a hole, an' never thinkin' I had the time er the money for a trip like this. But when the railroads jammed down their rates, I thinks to myse'f, 'I'll go!' Fer, you see, I 'lowed I could save a mite o' board by stayin' with Sid and Stella whilst I took in the Fair. It were a item to think about, fer these here Chicago hotels charge all-fired big prices. An' so I come; an' this is the kind of a snarl I jumped into. But I'm on the ground now, an' I'm goin' to see the thing through to the eend; an' I'm a-goin' to look after Stella, as if she was my own darter."

There was an earnestness about the old man's words that made Chicago Charlie respect him.

The autopsy was held after the visit of Stella and Uncle Steve, and to it Chicago Charlie gave his keenest attention.

The opinion expressed by the surgeons that Sidney Mayfield had committed suicide hardly satisfied the observant Columbian Detective. It would have done so, doubtless, had there been no robbery.

He found it exceedingly difficult to form any reasonable theory as a basis for future work. It seemed unlikely that burglars could have made their way into the room occupied by young Mayfield and there forced him to take the drug which had caused his death. It would have been a most unusual way of committing murder. The knife or

* See Dime Library No. 776.

the bludgeon would have been the weapon used.

If Stella Mayfield had administered the poison to her brother—a thing which Chicago Charlie was decidedly loth to believe—then a somewhat reasonable theory might be formulated as to how it had been done. Doubtless she would have been given access to the room, for Sidney Mayfield would never have suspected his sister of desiring to poison him. Also, relying implicitly in her honesty, he would not have hesitated to leave the diamonds exposed before her in their trays.

Yes; if Stella Mayfield might be considered the author of the double crime, then Chicago Charlie felt he would not have far to seek for a theory that would be sufficiently explanatory. But he hesitated to accept these light proofs, and he absolutely refused to act on them until they should have stronger backing.

With these thoughts whirling in his mind he left the building where the autopsy had been held, inwardly confessing that he was baffled at every point.

The questions that had first puzzled him were as puzzling as ever.

CHAPTER IV.

A QUEER CHASE.

For a half-hour thereafter the Columbian Detective was closeted with the members of the firm of David Davenish & Co., discussing the strange case in all its bearings.

No satisfactory conclusion had been reached when he left the building with one of the firm, but it had been definitely settled that the case should be committed to his hands, and that he was to be empowered to call to his aid such assistants as he might choose.

Crossing the bridge over the lagoon at the northeast corner of the Horticultural Building, Chicago Charlie and his companion came on a scene that caused the eyes of the latter gentleman to distend widely and an exclamation of surprise to break from his lips.

At the water's edge was a little girl, six or eight years of age, tossing up and down in her hands what she took to be a pretty, white pebble.

"One of the diamonds, as I'm a living man!" was the exclamation.

Philip Shawmut, of the firm of Davenish & Co., had probably never been so astounded in his life.

He was trembling all over with excitement, as he pointed a finger at the child.

"Do you see that?" he gasped. "That's one of the diamonds! One of the very gems missing from the tray! I could swear to it."

Before Chicago Charlie could open his lips in reply, Shawmut had turned about and was hurrying down the slope of the bridge, oblivious to everything except the girl so carelessly tossing the bauble up and down at the water's edge.

"Here, let me see that!" he was calling out, loud enough to attract attention.

The Columbian Detective overtook him and laid a hand warningly on his arm.

"Be careful!" was the whispered caution. "The people are looking at you. Better not let them get wind of it, or we may have trouble. Some rascal might precipitate a commotion and steal the diamonds from under our very noses."

As he said it, he wondered how long the child had stood there playing with the gem, all unobserved by the people crossing the bridge. If any had seen her they had given her no heed, doubtless thinking, with her, that the thing she had in her hands was only a bright pebble.

But Shawmut could not be restrained. His excitement was of the intense and feverish kind.

"Why, man, that's what I am hurrying for! I'm afraid some one else will get it. It's worth ten thousand dollars, if it's worth a cent! How do you suppose she came by it?"

With the question, he tore himself away and broke into a run; Chicago Charlie following at a rapid pace.

The girl looked up at this juncture, and was badly frightened at sight of these two men bearing down on her in that way, for Shawmut was called out to her to be careful or she would let the pebble fall into the water.

The result was what might have been expected. She dropped the diamond and turned to run.

But, the after result would never have been expected at all.

The diamond struck on a stone, and, rebounding, fell at the water's edge, where it was immediately gobbled up and swallowed by one of the many ducks feeding there!

Shawmut uttered a cry of dismay, and made a grab at the offending duck. But it eluded him, and he fell splashing in the edge of the lagoon.

Before he could rise, or Chicago Charlie could reach him, the duck, with its followers, was paddling hastily away, dodging in and out among the bushes and willows lining the margin.

"It's that one there!" Shawmut cried, leaping up, heedless of his bespattered and draggled appearance, and pointing a shaky finger at the center of the flock. "It's that one with the white in its wings. Don't let it get away! My God, man! It mustn't get away! It's swallowed a diamond worth ten thousand dollars—and—Here, have you a pistol? I believe I can wing it!"

So excited was he that he tore along the lagoon like a madman, flourishing his arms in a manner to frighten all the ducks congregated on the Exposition waters.

Chicago Charlie was amused and half angry. Shawmut had lost his head, and was making such an exhibition of himself that a crowd was rapidly gathering.

Here! the detective called out, in rather sharp tones. "You can never do anything that way. The duck can't get away, and we'll get it quicker by a different method."

Shawmut was throwing off his coat, with the manifest intention of plunging into the lagoon in his blind pursuit. He would have done so, too, if Chicago Charlie had not overhauled him again and restrained him by force.

"You'll gather half the people in the Fair ground here in a minute!" was the detective's impatient exclamation.

"But the duck!" Shawmut cried. "Don't you see it is getting away? How are we to tell it from the other ducks, when they get all mixed up together. It's got white in its wings; but there are probably a dozen more with white in their wings!"

As Chicago Charlie held the struggling man, he beckoned to one of the electric launches, which had drawn near.

A number of gondolas and launches had collected, their occupants drawn by the singular scene.

"Take us aboard!" said the detective, to the man in charge of the launch. "We want to catch that duck over there. This gentleman is very anxious to overtake it as quickly as possible."

"But!" and the conductor of the launch drew back. "Those ducks are—they mustn't be touched; it—it would raise a big row if I should help any one to catch them, don't you see?"

"Take us aboard!" the detective commanded. "We'll explain later."

The people were collecting around him in an unpleasant manner.

"We'll stand between you and all harm. Take us aboard, and then we'll tell you all about it."

"Yes! Yes!" Shawmut was ejaculating. "Take us aboard. No matter what the charge for the service. We've got to get that duck, without delay. I doubt even now if we can tell it from the others!"

Thus adjured, the man in the launch swung it about, and Chicago Charlie and his excitable companion scrambled in with all haste.

The launch was then headed for the flock of ducks, that still dodged exasperatingly in and out of the bushes.

"The duck has swallowed a very valuable gem belonging to this gentleman," the Columbian Detective hastily explained. "You will see that I am an officer, and I hope you will not hesitate further to aid us. We want to capture the duck before it becomes impossible to tell it from the others."

He lifted the lapel of his coat, as he spoke, and showed an official badge, the sight of which instantly quieted the launchman's fears.

"Let the duck gobble his breast-pin, eh? That beats my time!"

Chicago Charlie did not care to go further

into details, so did not attempt to correct the false impression; but turned his attention to the chase, which promised to be novel and exciting.

Philip Shawmut was seemingly now more wrought up than ever, if that were possible. He refused to sit down in the launch; but stood up, calling out excitedly and urging haste.

Then, when the launch swept round in full sight of the ducks, his excitement gave place to anger.

"It's just as I feared! The one we're after is gone!"

It was true. The duck with the white in its wings, the one Shawmut had pointed out, was not in view!

The launch was brought to a full stop, and then turned into the bushes in the hope of starting the duck, which was supposed to be in hiding there.

It could not be found; and the launch played round and round the place for several minutes, in a vain effort to rout it out.

Meanwhile, curious crowds had gathered on the main shore and on the island, and many members of these crowds were geying the unsuccessful searchers and shouting caustic advice.

"Put salt on its tail, an' then you'll git it!" one fellow yelled, in a voice heavy enough to drown the Thomas Orchestra. "What air ye duckin' fer, anyway?"

"If you'd only given me your pistol!" Shawmut growled. "I could have got it, then!"

"Yes; and have killed some one by a glancing ball!" the Columbian Detective made reply.

He was becoming annoyed beyond measure.

Just at that moment, when the chase seemed hopeless, the duck with the white in its wings paddled out from its place of concealment, and started to rejoin its mates.

The sight was too much for the excitable Shawmut.

He did not propose to give it a chance to get away again.

So he leaped head-first out of the launch into the lagoon and struck out for the duck.

He was a good swimmer, but, hampered as he was by his shoes and clothing, he had no chance in such a race.

Seeing that Shawmut was in no danger, Chicago Charlie directed the launch in pursuit, and after a short run, succeeded in overtaking the duck. But even then, because of its diving and swimming abilities, it was a minute or more before he could lay hands on the bird and drag it into the launch.

Shawmut came up at the side of the launch puffing like any porpoise, and was with difficulty assisted in.

And there he sat, wet as water could make him, shivering as with an ague, but clutching the duck in a grip that knew no relaxing.

"I'd have killed every duck in that cursed pond, but that I'd have got this one!" he ejaculated, a look of triumph lighting up his soaked countenance. "Why, gentlemen, that's a ten-thousand dollar duck! At least, it's worth that much to me!"

The diamond in the duck's stomach was his property, but the duck was not; and some arrangements with the Exposition management were necessary before the duck could be slaughtered and the diamond disintombed.

But this was accomplished, at length, after considerable running and fretting, which brought much amusement to all who had "caught on," and then Philip Shawmut bore the treasure back to its proper resting-place in the Davenish vault.

CHAPTER V.

AN UNSUCCESSFUL RAID.

Long before this had been accomplished, however, Chicago Charlie had gone in search of the child that had been playing with the diamond. He was anxious to know where she had picked it up, thinking the knowledge might furnish a valuable clue.

The information the little girl might possess was, to his mind, of more importance even than the recovery of the diamond. It might lead to the recovery of all the gems, and to the unraveling of the mystery surrounding their loss.

It was like the proverbial search for the needle in the haystack, but by dint of much hard work and close scrutiny, the detective succeeding at last in finding the child, whose face and dress he had had good cause to remember.

"You're one of the men that scared me," she naively confessed, edging for safety nearer to the big sister who accompanied her. "I didn't know the little stone was any account or I wouldn't have took it."

"I'm glad you found it, and that we saw you with it!" said the Columbian Detective, gaining her good will by an offer of candy. "Otherwise, we'd likely never have seen it again. You didn't know it was a diamond?"

That "little Laura" had had a diamond in her possession that morning intensified the interest of the big sister, who now came with her questionings to Chicago Charlie's assistance.

The result of their combined efforts was the disclosure of the fact that the child had picked up the diamond in Midway Plaisance, directly in front of the Zulu exhibit, but a short half hour before she was seen with it at the lagoon, and that her attention had been attracted to it by its peculiar glitter.

She had never dreamed it was of any value, but had meant to take the "pretty rock" home with her to play with.

An armful of things that delight the eye and palate of a child came from the detective to the little girl as a reward for her frankness and truthfulness; and then the Columbian Detective walked away, feeling that perhaps here was the clue he had been seeking.

A casual inspection of the Zulu colony, the same that had come up two nights before on the Illinois Central, brought no further information.

Not satisfied with this, for there were many places in this home of the Zulus where valuables much larger than diamonds might be securely hidden, he went in search of Jack Rackstraw and Billy Stubbs, who were now engaged with him in regular detective work, and summoned also to his assistance a number of Columbian guards.

Preliminary to this, he obtained a search-warrant from a justice of the peace, that he might be duly authorized to enter on the search he contemplated.

"I don't know that we'll find anything," he explained to Rackstraw and Billy Stubbs, "in fact I hardly think we will. But if there are guilty parties among those Zulus, they may show it by some exhibition of fear. That's why I've called you. Keep your eyes open for anything of the kind."

Billy Stubbs was in his element, now that another important case appeared to be opening up for their investigation, and Jack Rackstraw, who was developing surprising abilities in the detective line, was scarcely less pleased.

"Zulus, is it?" questioned honest Jack, scrubbing his fingers through his brushy beard. "I've tackled nighabout every other form o' man an' beast, but never Zulus. I reckon, though, they're purty much like any other niggers!"

That any members of the Zulu colony could have engineered so shrewd a burglary as that they were now discussing appeared highly improbable. It would be crediting them with too much intelligence, not to say familiarity with the ways of civilization. They might know a good deal about asagais and calabashes, but little enough, surely, about diamond vaults and modern poisons.

Nevertheless, there was a chance that some one or more of them might have undertaken to conceal the gems for a time.

Still, the discovery of the diamond in front of the exhibit might mean nothing more than that it had been dropped there by one of the burglars while hurrying through Midway.

But a search of the Zulu colony was the only thing that suggested, and Chicago Charlie was not in the habit of leaving any stone unturned, however unpromising the venture.

The manager of the Zulu colony was somewhat surprised by the show of force and the search-warrant which Chicago Charlie brought to bear on him, and he was also inclined to be indignant.

"You can make a search, certainly. I haven't the slightest objection to that. But you must remember, my dear fellow, that these Zulus have been in Chicago hardly sixty hours;—so you will see how preposterous is your idea. A band of Zulus from the wilds of Africa committing a diamond robbery in the Exposition grounds, when they aren't straight yet as to the points of the compass!"

It certainly did seem preposterous, and the Columbian Detective was forced to admit as much; but he was, nevertheless, firm in his demand, and the search was begun.

Nothing whatever came of it; and when Chicago Charlie retreated with his force from this little section of Zululand, it was with the feeling that he had been making a fool of himself.

CHAPTER VI.

THE COLUMBIAN QUARTETTE.

In the cozy room at his home which Chicago Charlie had fitted up for an office, and which he affectionately denominated his "den," a small but interested company gathered that evening. The company consisted only of the Columbian Detective, Billy Stubbs and Jack Rackstraw.

They had gathered there to formulate a plan of campaign and to discuss the diamond robbery and the murder, for they had come to believe that Sidney Mayfield's life had been taken by another, and not by himself.

"I've heard of a good many snarly cases," Rackstraw reflectively observed, "but nothin' with quite so much pucker in it as this. You can't tell where it begins ner where it ends. If I wasn't sure Sidney Mayfield is dead, I'd think he stole them di'monds hisself. Hanged if I wouldn't!"

"It might have been his sister," Chicago Charlie suggested, looking keenly at the sailor. "You'd thought of that?"

"Hain't thought very high of it, as an opinion. There was a straight case in p'int once, which hadn't a foot to stand on, as you'll remember! Therefore, I don't think much o' the idee. I've been talkin' to Lilly, too; an' she says that you're gone clean daft, if you've got that in your head."

Jack Rackstraw was fond of quoting Miss Lilly Lilac; being, like most lovers, inclined to value the opinions of his sweetheart very highly.

"I felt the same to-day," Chicago Charlie asserted. "But I stumbled against a fact, this afternoon, that I hadn't dreamed of before."

"You know, it's one of the axioms of our profession, that no crime is ever committed without a motive. No deed of any kind is ever done without a motive."

"And, when I thought of Stella Mayfield in that connection, I began to ask myself why she would be likely to do such a thing. Of course, there was the motive of robbery—the possession of the diamonds; but I figured that that would hardly be strong enough."

"So I began to look about for another and still stronger one, believing that, if she gave that poison to her brother, she did not do it for the mere sake of gaining wealth. I reasoned that some deep seated enmity had existed between them."

"And when I started out along that line I discovered something that surprised me."

Both Rackstraw and Billy Stubbs were listening with every manifestation of interest.

"I found that, when her father died, a few months ago, he left a most singular, and, as it seems to me, unjust will. Stella Mayfield was engaged to be married to a man by the name of Barton Brown. The old gentleman, it appears, took a great dislike to Brown, and ordered Stella to have nothing further to do with him."

"This the girl disregarded; and when he died and his will was opened it was found he had disinherited her, if she went against his wishes in this matter. And further, that if she married any one within ten years, without the consent of her brother, Sidney Mayfield, she was not to receive a penny of the estate; but it was all to become Sidney's."

"I found further that Sidney Mayfield had been as bitter against Brown as the old gentleman had been; and that between them they had driven the girl half-wild."

"Of course it was an unreasonable thing to provide that the girl's marriage should depend so entirely on her brother's consent. The chances were great that if she took a notion to marry within the ten years she would do so anyway; and thus Sidney would get all the money. So you see it would have been to Sidney's interest to oppose her marriage, from a financial standpoint."

"Barton Brown is a great scamp, as I have every reason to believe, and if the girl marries him she will probably live to regret it. But generally, when a woman makes up her mind to marry a man, such considerations have no weight. She will marry him, regardless of the consequences, or in the foolish hope of reforming him. That has been my observation; and old Mayfield showed a lack of knowledge of human nature in making such a will."

"There was another girl who had a dad who opposed her marryin' a certain feller, if I réecommember rightly!" Rackstraw slyly observed, looking at Billy Stubbs and squinting in Chicago Charlie's direction.

"But she married me just the same; and I hope she'll never regret it!"

"But that's not to the point. You will see that, when Sidney Mayfield died from that poison, there was no longer any one to forbid the marriage of Stella Mayfield to Barton Brown; nor was there any longer any one to take possession of her money, should she do such a thing. She is now her own mistress, and can marry Barton Brown, or any one else she chooses. Is there a point there or not? I think there is!"

It was a new theory; and, backed by the knowledge that there had been no good feeling existing between brother and sister, it seemed a strong one.

To Chicago Charlie, who recalled so distinctly the strange expression that had come to Stella Mayfield's face when she beheld the bottle of poison on the surgeon's table, it was a theory that was almost convincing.

It did not seem strange that there might have existed sufficient enmity between the brother and sister, brought about by an unfortunate train of circumstances, to make the sister wish to take that brother's life.

At any rate, the theory was a suggestive one, and worth working; and the more especially was this true because of a lack of any other that was in the least degree satisfying.

"If you say we are to foller along that line, I'm with ye; though I don't go into it with any big hopes!"

Rackstraw almost grumbled the words.

"I not only want you to help me in the matter, but I want you to induce Lilly Lilac to help me."

Even Billy Stubbs was surprised at this statement; and Jack Rackstraw opened his mouth in wonder.

"I 'low she couldn't be druv to. She hates this detective biz, and she keeps a-sayin' to me every day, 'Jack Rackstraw, if you don't quit that line o' work, plagued if I'll marry you. Fer you're liable to get killed one o' these days, an' then I'd be left a widder!' P'intedly, Charlie Clingstone, I don't think she could be druv to it!"

"I want you to induce her to go into the Mayfield residence as a servant," Chicago Charlie continued, paying not the slightest heed to this protest. "If you use that blarneying tongue of yours, Jack, you can do it. Tell her that I especially desire it, and maybe that will help you out. I shall rely on you to do this. We must have Miss Lilly go there, and act as a spy on the movements of this girl."

"But, how is it to be done?" Rackstraw demanded. "Mebbe they ain't wantin' any servants. And besides, there's the Infant Wonder! What's to become o' him? Miss Lilly wouldn't budge a step, less'n she could take with her Christopher Columbus Stubbs, as we calls him. What in tarnation's to become o' Christopher?"

It was plainly to be seen that Jack Rackstraw did not want Miss Lilly Lilac to become engaged in any such enterprise; which was perhaps natural enough, as he and the fair Lilly were expecting soon to become yoked in matrimony.

"If you'd only give me time to explain!" was the laughing exclamation. "Uncle Steve Mayfield told me that Miss Stella was wanting a house servant, and that gave me

the idea. I know that Miss Lilly would suit her. Yes, you must have her go, by all means. It is an opportunity not to be missed. And as for that important bit of humanity, Christopher Columbus Stubbs, *alias* the Infant Wonder, why, I don't know that there's anything to prevent her taking him along. She can make the effort, anyway!

"No further objections, Captain Jack, if you please!" as Rackstraw was again opening his lips. "I'll not hear them!"

"And, now, for other assignments; for we must cover the ground thoroughly. We haven't a great deal to go on, in this case; so we must make the most of what little we have!"

"Did ye find where that bottle come from?" Billy interposed, at this juncture, his thoughts still busy with the mystery.

"No, it's undiscoverable. I made a pretty thorough search of the town. I meant to speak of that. I found at one place where a bottle like that had been sold to Stella Mayfield some time ago, but it contained no such drug as was in that bottle. There is really no means of identifying the bottle, for the label had been removed. So many bottles resemble that one, and a bottle is only a bottle. So I attached no particular significance to the fact that she had purchased some medicine in a similar bottle, inasmuch as the thing she purchased was not a poison.

"Now, to the assignments. I want you, Rackstraw, to watch Barton Brown. Stay with him, and learn what he is doing, where he goes, and everything of that kind; and especially notice the sort of men he associates with, and observe whether, in your opinion, any of them are the kind of men to have had a hand in the robbery. I know I can rely on you to do that!"

"I never disobey orders," Rackstraw protested. "That is, when they pertain strictly to Jack Rackstraw. When they interfere with the freedom and plans of—"

"We know, Jack, what you would say; and we know, too, that you will waive your objections, this time, and obey orders, even if they do pertain to a certain female whom you esteem very highly.

"And now for another assignment.

"Billy Stubbs will give his undivided attention to the Zulus. I'm not satisfied, yet, that those black rascals are as innocent as circumstances seem to make them. Anyway, a little shadowing of the Zulu village can do no harm, and may result in something. And Billy is just the boy for a job of that kind!"

Nothing could have given more satisfaction to Billy. In addition to the natural excitements attendant on the work of shadowing, there was promised the unusual zest of watching a novel and singular race of people.

Billy Stubbs—for by this name he was still known, and had been so known since he was an humble newsboy—had taken up the calling of a detective from a pure love of the work. An extra inducement, perhaps, was his high regard for his brother-in-law, Chicago Charlie, who, as the Columbian Detective, was rapidly achieving an enviable reputation.

Billy Stubbs had a new route on Midway Plaisance; and, when serving his customers there, went attired very much after the fashion of any other Chicago newsboy. He was still a boy in years, with all a boy's love of sport, and herded with these gamins of the street with a familiarity that was alloyed with pleasure.

His news route on Midway would greatly aid him in his work of watching the Zulus.

"As for myself, I want to give my undivided attention to the diamond robbery, and to do that shall remain pretty close to the building occupied by David Davenish & Co. Some employee of the firm may have had a hand in the work, or some one who is working near the exhibit. My plans haven't much shape yet, but it strikes me, now, that is the best thing to do."

There was a knock at the front door, and when Chicago Charlie went himself to meet the caller he found the countryman, Stephen Mayfield. There was a bell pull at the side of the door, which Uncle Steve had disregarded or had not seen.

"I swow, I'm glad to see ye! Was most afeard to come up here to-night. Never

feel safe on the streets after dark sets in an' them street lamps are lighted. There's so many pesky black holes. Fell over a big stone awhile ago, and like to a-bu'sted me.

"If it wasn't fer this tarnal snarl we got into I'd git out o' Chicago as quick as a train 'u'd kerry me. Hain't to say, seen a pesky thing o' that show yet; an' it seems like I hain't a-goin' to git to. Thought as how I'd take it in to-day; an' the fu'st thing I knowed I found myse'f clean outside o' the blamed thing! There was a place marked 'Exit,' an' seein' other fellers goin' through it, I went through, too. An' I'm slamgasted, if I didn't find myse'f clean out o' the hull show! You could 'a' knocked me down 'ith a feather when I seen what I'd done. An' I had to go back an' git another ticket an' pay out another good half-dollar before I could git in ag'in. A cuss on Chicago, anyway! It's money, money, everywhere you turn. If I stay here much longer I'll have to mortgage the ranch!"

He was wringing the detective's hand, as he talked, and they were walking toward the room where the conference had been held.

Chicago Charlie was not sorry that Uncle Steve had put in an appearance at that time, for he believed the sturdy old farmer and ranchman from the Dakota plains might be made of signal service in the search that was being inaugurated.

"I jist wanted to come up an' ask what you'd found out to-day. Them pesky doctors don't know *nothin'*! The idee o' callin' that a case o' suicide! Why, man! it's *murder*! Can't see how anybody kin doubt that. Sid Mayfield, if he'd been wantin' to kill hisself, wouldn't never gone about it that way. Not by a tarnation sight, he wouldn't! Suicide, fiddlesticks!"

Chicago Charlie was much of the same mind, as were also the others in the room into which Uncle Steve had been shown.

"As I said, I reckon I'll have to mortgage the farm 'fore I git through with it; but I'm goin' to stay by the thing, an' look after Stella awhile, if it takes ever' cent I've got!"

"Perhaps you'll be willing to report to me, then!" Chicago Charlie suggested. "We're all going into this work. The Davenish Company has employed me to sift the thing to the bottom. You want to discover the murderer of Sidney Mayfield, and they want to find the robbers and get back their diamonds. One road will probably lead to both these results. What do you say?"

"That I'm with ye!" Uncle Steve declared, a pleased smile overspreading his face. "I'm perfectly willin' to work under your orders; but, orders er no orders, I'm determined to keep hammerin' away till I 'com- plish somethin'!"

"Then, we may consider our company organized for work. Let me see! what shall we call it? Ah, I have a name! The Columbian Quartette!"

CHAPTER VII.

AT THE CALL OF THE MUEZZIN.

"AYALEM SELAM! *Ayalem Selam! Ayalem Penah, Allah Ikbar! La ila ilallah Mohammed Ressoul Allah!*"

The melodious and plaintively-wailing chant of the muezzin floated over the throng in Midway Plaisance, from a little circular balcony at the top of the white minaret, near the Mohammedan Mosque.

It was the Mohammedan call to prayers, heard there five times daily, and which no good Mohammedan ever disobeyed.

It fell on many curious American ears, also; for the muezzin's plaintive call never failed to attract attention, so different was it from any sound ordinarily heard in this country.

The time was evening; and this was the last call to prayer for the day.

In the throng in Midway was one man, who, though he had grown accustomed to the music of the muezzin's voice, always stopped to listen to the odd intonations. This man was Chicago Charlie.

He did not stray to the vicinity of the mosque by chance, however, on this evening, but came with a well-defined purpose. In fact, he had followed a man there from the Zulu exhibit; and his eyes were fixed on this individual when the muezzin began the call.

This man was a black; and, for a time, Chicago Charlie had fancied him one of the Zulu blacks, even though his clothing differed so materially from the garments worn by the Zulus.

The Columbian Quartette had begun work, and each member of that quartette was prosecuting his allotted task, with assiduity.

That morning, they had secured passes admitting them into the grounds at any and all times; and had been forced to sit for their photographs, before those potent bits of pasteboard, were given them, in accordance with the regulations of the World's Fair officials.

Uncle Steve had not fancied the photographing process, but he was immeasurably delighted with the pass that became his, for it meant the saving of many half-dollars, and a half-dollar was often as big as a wagon-wheel to the eyes of Uncle Steve.

Chicago Charlie was not thinking of these passes, though; nor of Uncle Steve, at that moment. His gaze and his thoughts were fixed on the black he had been shadowing.

That the black was not a native of this country, he was quickly convinced, when the fellow dropped down on his knees in the dust at that call of the muezzin. He had never known a native black of this country who was a Mohammedan.

There had been something in the manner of this black, when seen by the Columbian Detective near the Zulu exhibit, which had irresistibly drawn the detective's attention. More than once a subtle feeling or instinct had told Chicago Charlie that such and such an individual should be watched, and this feeling had again come over him on seeing this black.

He had obeyed the voice of the monitor and had followed the black to this point, but without any result, other than this verification of his belief that the man was not an American by birth.

Services in the little mosque always followed and the prostrations in Midway; and the black entered the mosque with his fellow religionists.

Many of them came out, shortly afterward, but the black was not seen to be among them.

The darkness of night was coming on rapidly, and Chicago Charlie, to escape observation, slipped into the shadow of the building and there awaited the coming of the negro.

Others came out, but still the black was not to be seen.

This was a singular thing, in itself, according to Chicago Charlie's idea, and it made him uneasy.

It told him that the black was a thoroughly wide-awake fellow, and had probably discovered that he was being pursued. Probably he had become alarmed, and had left the mosque by some other entrance, if there were any such, and thus had given the Columbian Detective the slip.

It was not a pleasant reflection. The only grain of comfort to be extracted from it was the increasing certainty it afforded that the black was possessed of some sort of guilty knowledge that made him afraid of officials. What that knowledge was, Chicago Charlie was ready to think concerned the missing diamonds and the death of Sidney Mayfield.

At first glance, it seemed improbable that a Mohammedan black could know anything of these things, but the detective's experience, gained in the the pursuit of *roues*, made him sometimes look for suspicious circumstances where it seemed none could exist.

Puzzled as to the course he should pursue, and still hoping the black would emerge from the mosque, the Columbian Detective remained hidden in the shadows, scanning keenly every person who passed the building.

But, with all his close watching—and he remained there several hours—he failed to observe the dark forms that crept toward him from some shadows at his back.

These did not appear until the hour had grown late, and the throngs that usually surged through Midway had almost completely disappeared.

The detective was growing restless, feeling sure that he had been beaten by the wily black, and was on the point of rising up and slipping quietly from the vicinity, when a

silken thread, like a lasso, or the wind-blown web of a spider, swung toward him through the gloom. It was of silken fineness, and hardly distinguishable in the darkness.

Then it dropped in a snaky fold over his head and about his neck; and, in another moment, he was jerked backward, and almost into insensibility!

The hair-like thread cut like a knife-blade, and so compressed his throat that he could not breathe. A dim, bloody mist swam before his vision, blotting out sight of mosque and street.

At the same instant, the rascal, who had hurled the deadly noose, sprung forward, to finish the work so well begun.

But, the scamp did not count on the agility and nervy energy of the detective, for the latter, even though his senses were reeling and he was rapidly passing into a state of unconsciousness, heard the light patter of feet, and, lunging out with his heels, by a happy fortune struck the scamp full in the pit of the stomach, doubling him up like a jack-knife, and rolling him, howling on the ground.

The howl of pain was heard across the street, and two Germans, dallying still in a beer garden, leaped up at the sound and rushed in that direction.

The murderous rascal, hearing this, stopped his moans of pain, and, picking himself up, scudded for the gloom from whence he had appeared, and vanished—the comrades who had been there in waiting, darting away at the same time.

"Py sheminy, t'e man is dead!" the first German cried, lifting the head of the fallen detective. "A mans kilt right here in Mitway! Dot peats me, vor shure!"

However, the faint breathing of Chicago Charlie reassured him; for, now that the silken cord had loosened somewhat, the choking sensation was vanishing and the detective was in better condition.

Between them, they bore him to the light; and then the cord was discovered, which called for more Germanic exclamations, as it was loosed and critically scanned.

They agreed they had never seen anything just like that, and had never heard of a similar occurrence; which is not to be wondered at, for this cord of the strangler is not a European or American product, but hails from the far East.

A dash of water in the detective's face, and the forcing of some stimulants down his throat, so revived him, that, in a little while he was able to sit up, and to give an account of what had befallen him.

He looked at the silken lasso with great curiosity. It explained, in a measure, the attack, and served to further convince him that much might be gained by shadowing the black Mohammedan.

There could be no doubt that either he or some of his countrymen or Oriental friends were the authors of this murderous attempt on the detective's life.

The black, then, had not remained in the mosque. In some manner he had managed to leave it unobserved; either by another door, or by emerging from the same door in disguise. And he had gone in search of aid to help him "do up" the American who was making himself so disagreeable.

The villainous attempt had almost succeeded, too—showing that the black was a desperate and dangerous fellow, and proving that the detective, in trailing him, must do so with eyes and ears wide open, and every sense on the alert.

Chicago Charlie rewarded the Germans with some rousing schooners of beer, the beverage so dear to the Teutonic heart; explained as much as he cared to, or thought advisable; and finally took his way from Midway, with thoughts sufficiently astir to give him a sleepless night.

What did this black know of the diamonds and murder of Sidney Mayfield? What connection had this black, if any, with the Zulus? The questions were likely to prove hard to answer; and in seeing their solution, there was every probability that keen detective work would be required.

Yet Chicago Charlie did not shrink from the task, because of its difficulties. He rather welcomed it for that reason; feeling that the greater the obstacles to be overcome, the greater the honor and pleasure when the mystery should be laid bare.

CHAPTER VIII.

BILLY STUBBS STRIKES A TRAIL

BILLY STUBBS lay out in the black shadows in front of the Zulu village, at a very late hour, on the same night that witnessed the events detailed in the last chapter.

He had lain there for a long time, having reached his post of observation at a comparatively early hour.

He was as keen-eyed, as alert, and as thoroughly reckless as any gamin of the Chicago streets; and, impelled by strong motives, was also wonderfully patient and shrewd of observation.

He had crawled close to the fence that walled the Zulus in from the curious gazers of Midway Plaisance; and there he had lain, hour after hour, scarcely moving, but listening to all the varied sounds coming from the Zulu colony.

None of them were of a very satisfying character;—none of them told him of the things he would know.

In truth, he hardly knew what to expect. His orders had been to watch the Zulu colony, and to note carefully what occurred within range of his sight and hearing, and to closely study any persons passing in or out after nightfall.

It will be seen that, while broad enough, the instructions were rather indefinite; though they were quite as definite as Chicago Charlie could make them at that time.

Billy Stubbs was faithfully endeavoring to carry out these orders to the letter; but he was not pleased with the poor results so far obtained. He had literally seen nor heard anything calculated to excite suspicion.

There had been much talk and gabble of a kind wholly incomprehensible, and many guttural exclamations; and once there was the added excitement of a prospective fight between two of the assagai-wielders from the African wilds. But the fight had not taken place; and Billy dropped back into the old state of quiet waiting.

"Even old Micawber would git tired o' this!" Billy was thinking. "It's my opinion there hain't a plaguey thing goin' to turn up this night; an' fer all the good I'm doin', I might jist as well be at home in bed."

"I'm tired, now, an' sleepy, too-oo-oo!
Come put me in my lit-tul bed!"

The words of the old song were running drowsily through his mind, when something occurred to rouse him into full wakefulness.

A man approached—the dark-faced man whom Chicago Charlie had watched at the mosque;—and this man, instead of trying to obtain entrance at the proper place, swung himself deftly and actively over the high fence.

Billy Stubbs saw him plainly outlined against the sky, as he mounted, and his thought was that this was one of the Zulus, dressed in clothing ordinarily worn, who had stolen out to make a night of it, and who was returning in this surreptitious way to escape a lecturing.

But, this idea was dissipated.

The words that immediately reached him showed that the man was not one of the Zulus; or at any rate, that, if a Zulu, he was a Zulu who could speak English.

"I want to have a talk with you," was the whispered sentence. "That cursed detective has been on my trail, and I came near doing him up. A couple of chaps dived in at the wrong moment, or I would have made it. But, curse him! I'll get him next time, if he tries the trick again!"

"I've been waiting for you!" the other voice asserted. "Waitin' a thunderin' long time, too!"

Billy Stubbs's curiosity was aroused to the utmost, and he was resolved to hear more.

The men had moved away from the wall, and the whispered talk had died out.

"I've got to get into that thing, an' now's the time fer the rope trick!" Billy muttered, quickly unwinding from his shoulders a long rope, looped at the ends which he had brought as part of his working paraphernalia.

He had been on the point, once before that night, of using it, but had concluded the circumstances did not warrant it.

Now, thrilling with excitement, he crept from his place of concealment, and stole softly up to the fence, at the point where the black had mounted.

Selecting a point on the wall, he tossed up the loop of the rope, hoping to thus secure it. Two or three efforts were required before the loop took hold.

It would have been impossible for Billy Stubbs to have mounted the wall in the manner of the black. He could only hope to ascend by means of the looped rope.

He drew on it, when he saw the loop had caught, and, as it seemed capable of sustaining his strength, he climbed up slowly and cautiously, being careful to avoid the slightest sound.

It was laborious work, and, when the top of the wall was gained, Billy was breathing heavily and was somewhat fatigued.

He drew up the rope that had so well upborne him, and tossed the free end to the ground inside the fence. Then he slipped down without trouble, and found himself in the Zulu village, having gained access to it quite as surreptitiously as the black had done.

But he comforted himself with the reflection, that, even if caught thus by some one connected with the Fair, or with Midway, he could give ample excuse by an exhibition of the papers he carried on his person, and of the special pass that had been issued to him that morning.

There was far more danger, however, from the Zulus; and particularly great peril to be feared from the black he was following.

There was every reason to think that that individual would not be highly pleased with the knowledge that he was being thus watched, and might desire to take summary vengeance on the daring police spy.

Billy disregarded all such considerations, and, leaving the rope dangling against the wall, ready for instant use, he crept stealthily in the direction the two men had gone.

He had not been able to see them depart from the vicinity of the wall, but their voices had told him the course they had taken.

It was a place easy to become lost in—the Zulu colony, at that hour of the night; and Billy Stubbs had to exercise much discretion. There were everywhere sleeping and snoring men; and the danger of treading on some of the prostrate forms was considerable.

That all seemed to be sound asleep, was a satisfaction, however. Even should they be accidentally aroused, they would not become wide-awake in an instant, and would not be able to comprehend what it was that awoke them. In this, lay Billy's safety.

The black and the man met behind the wall, had disappeared; but Billy was not long in locating them.

They had retired to a quiet corner, free from observation, and where they might talk without danger of being seen.

Billy was drawn thither by the low sounds of their voices; and, making his way by a roundabout path, succeeded, in a short time, in gaining their rear and approaching close enough to hear what was being said.

A large pile of curious wares were heaped on the ground, and behind these the men were ensconced. Billy crawled as near as to this pile as he dared; and then flattened himself out like a lizard basking in the sun, prepared to drink in their words.

They were words, too, calculated to stimulate his already feverish interest.

They were speaking of diamonds; but, whether of the diamonds stolen from Davenish & Co., or some other diamonds, he was at a loss to determine.

"I've seen a good many such stones in the Kimberley diamond fields, of South Africa," the black was saying, "but as to the worth of them here I don't know a thing. I'd know pretty well what they were worth there; but here it's different."

"Nighabout there as here!" the white insisted. "Don't reckon the place would make much difference. It don't cost much to ship such things. They ain't a bit hefty!"

"Costs like thunder!" the black declared. "You don't know what you're talking about when you say that. There's an infernal high duty on them. Just how much, I don't know. But I'm told it's away up. That would make a big difference; and besides, vessels charge high for carrying such things, on account of the risk."

"I think such stones must be a good deal

higher here than in Kimberley; and I shouldn't be surprised if they're worth twice as much here as there. Though, of course, I don't know anything about it for sure."

"What did Cap Clover say about it?" the white man asked.

"I didn't question him. I suppose he could have told me, but he wasn't in a good humor, and I didn't speak of it. When Captain Clover is riding his high horse, the best plan is to stand from under. I've learned that."

"Do you think there's any likelihood that the chap that follered you to-day will do it ag'in?"

The inquiry brought forth a smothered curse.

"Well, he'd better not try it! If he thinks that's a healthy business, he'll find himself badly fooled, one of these fine nights. He'll drop out of the detective business altogether. A curse on the scoundrels, anyway!"

"I'll agree with you in that last, pardner. I wish they was every one drowned in the lake. Out my way, when we run across the trail of one, we give him a ticket out of the world by the necktie route. I'd like to do it here."

"'Twouldn't be safe!" the black averred. "There are quieter and better ways than that, and safer ways, too, for a city. What would serve where you hail from is very well there. But it won't do here. I learned a trick or two, though, in the land that I came from, that'll be likely to astonish the gentleman."

"I hope, though, that he'll take warning from his experience of to-night, and let up on the shadow business. It's apt to be awfully unhealthy; and, if he's a wise man, he'll drop it."

"Nary! They don't drop sich things in this country. He'll be hotter on your trail than ever, and you will have to look out for him."

An expressive clicking guttural was the only reply.

"Well, I allow I must be goin'. I'll manage to see you again. Keep your eyes open, that's my advice; an' you'll find it mighty good advice, too. That chap'll be after you hot and heavy, before to-morrow night."

If the rascals, who had risen to go, could have known of the shadow lying almost at their feet, they would probably have been much startled. But it never occurred to them, that any police spy was so perilously near. They never dreamed of any one scaling the fence and dogging them in that persistent way.

Billy Stubbs was panting with suppressed interest, and he longed to get a view of the face of the white man.

He had not fully seen the features of the black, but he had seen enough to give him the black's general appearance, so that he felt confident of his ability to recognize him again.

He would have been almost content, if he could have said the same of the white man.

The two arose together and walked slowly through a small aisle and out toward the wall.

Billy dared not hover too near them, but he crept along as close to their heels as a due regard for the safety of his neck permitted, and he was only a few yards distant, when they scaled the high wall and dropped down into Midway Plaisance.

But the black dropped back, almost as quickly, and Billy came near being discovered.

Billy retreated with considerable precipitation, wondering at this singular action.

In another moment, the white man came back over the wall, and then the two stood on the inside, whispering in low and earnest tones.

"I reckon we'd better lay low awhile!" came the words. "There's a suspicious-looking chap out there, and I don't want him to see me."

Notwithstanding their fears, the black scaled the wall again in a few minutes, and whispered back to the white man that the way was open.

But the latter, who seemed of a cautious disposition, tarried inside the fence; and Billy Stubbs, forced by his action to remain in concealment, could not tell in what direction the black had gone.

CHAPTER IX.

UNDER THE WHITE CITY.

BILLY STUBBS might have learned a great many things worth knowing, could he have followed the black, as the latter left Midway Plaisance.

Entering the Exposition grounds, at the end of this long street, he crossed to the lake side, in the vicinity of the long wharf that projects into the lake in front of the Peristyle.

Although he had walked swiftly, he had carefully marked his steps and been extremely cautious in his movements. The electric lamps flooded all the open spaces; and, though the hour was late, many people were still to be seen moving about the grounds.

The black was careful not to approach any of this people, and showed his desire to remain unobserved.

When he reached the lake front he stopped for a time and looked out over the water. Various kinds of crafts were swinging there at anchor, with their lights gleaming like fires against the background of the night. The swash of the waves and the piping of the night wind, furnished a subdued music.

This halt was evidently a precaution, taken to make sure he had not been followed.

Being satisfied that all was well, he walked along the water's edge; slipping in and out of the long shadows cast by the buildings and the tall columns; hastening from one black spot to another, as if anxious to escape the light.

He proceeded in this manner until he gained the other shore end of the wharf.

He then stooped down, as if he knew the place well; and squeezed through a small, black opening; disappearing from the view of any one, either in the grounds or on the waters.

There was nothing about this opening to attract special attention. There were many others like it, where the timbers of the wharf rose slightly above the earth or the water.

Once under the wharf, he felt about in the gloom until his hands rested on a small boat; and into this he stepped, pushing it away from the shore.

For a paddle he used one of his hands, for the distance traversed by the boat was only a few yards.

Then it brought up against some timbers, with a bump and he held it in place by clutching a piling.

When he had steadied the boat, he leaned forward and rapped dully on a piling, with his knuckles; the sound given out being subdued and hollow. After which he called:

"Clover! Cul-cul-over!"

The call could not have been heard five feet away.

Evidently some one was in waiting, anticipating such a summons; for, after a short delay, a section of the bank just above the water-line swung slowly and softly inward; the black hole that was thus made being visible only because of the deeper intensity of its gloom.

"Who is it?" was the whispered question.

"Clover! Cul-cul-over!"

The reply came back:

"Clover!"

Then the boat swung inward as if pulled by a strong hand, and the black sprung out to the ground.

The boat had not gone out into the lake, nor toward the open water, but had merely described a small semicircle beneath the wharf, and touched again at the shore end, further under the wharf, and nearer the wharf's center.

The piling upholding the wharf's shore end ran straight to the sloping shore, and the door, which now admitted the black and his boat into an underground passage, was most cunningly devised.

To the keenest eye, even in broad daylight—and the daylight under the wharf was always a semi-gloom—the lake shore at that point would have seemed unbroken, and merely a muddy and sandy bank. That there was a door there would not have been believed.

It was a most ingenious contrivance, and must have cost its inventors a deal of thought and hard work. A timber framework, or boxing, had been set in the end of a tunnel that led toward and under the grounds of the

great Exposition; and in the end of this boxing or framework, was the door, opening just above the water.

The door was covered with mud and sand, or some substance resembling mud and sand in a remarkable manner; so that it seemed but a part of the mud and sand that surrounded it, and so cunningly were the joints hidden that they would have defied a very close inspection.

There was a rope attached to the boat, which ran through a small iron ring attached to the piling where it had been moored when the black entered it; and, as soon as the black had disembarked, the man who had responded to his call and opened the secret door, drew on this rope; and the boat glided quietly to the point from which it had been brought.

Thus it would seem that the boat was a primitive sort of ferry, used surreptitiously by these men, who found it safe or convenient to hide in this way in the tunnel leading back from the wharf.

Then the door swung to, as quietly as it had opened, and the two men were alone in the gloomy depths.

A few words passed between them; after which the black moved along the low tunnel, bending his head to keep from striking the upper timbers, and feeling the sides with his hands, as he advanced.

It was a wet and unwholesome place, covered with patches of dripping slime, that made the black curse vigorously whenever his hands or clothing came in contact with it. The stooping, caused by the lowness of the roof and the narrowness of the passage, also served to add to his ill-humor.

So that, when he at length came into the gleam of a lamp, streaming from the further depths, he was scarcely in a mood to bless and appreciate it, or to bless and appreciate anything.

As the light grew brighter, the shape of the tunnel became outlined. It resembled a long box set in the earth, and more than anything else looked like a sewer.

It led far under the White City, and opened finally into a cavern of considerable height and diameter.

This cavern was comfortably furnished, and had not the dripping, slimy appearance of the passage that led to it. Sewage and surface water seemed to have been excluded by a liberal application of cement to the walls. The chilly sensation, felt in the passage, was likewise absent here; for the cavern was warmed by a small gasoline heater, that gave out no smoke and very little odor.

There were two men in the room, when the black entered it. One of them was Barton Brown, the lover and fiance of Stella Mayfield. The other was a bushy-bearded fellow, with mild blue eyes and a somewhat genteel appearance. But he interlarded his conversation with so many oaths that it could be readily seen the gentlemanly appearance was but an outward show, and that at heart he was a ruffian.

This was the man who had been spoken of as Captain Clover; and it was his name that had been used that night as the key or password giving admittance to this underground retreat!

"Hello, Kimberley!" was his rough greeting to the black. "You're late. Thought you wasn't coming to-night. You'll have to attend the meetings more promptly, or you'll find, some of these times when you come in late this way, that we've divided the swag and skipped by the light of the moon."

There was an air of jocularly in the tones, which seemed to fall with ill-grace from Captain Clover.

"How many of those diamonds is Kimberley to get, anyhow?" Barton Brown questioned, quizzically eying the black. "I was a fool, I guess, to go into this scheme with you fellows. If I'd had a little more nerve, I might have worked the trick myself, and gripped all the boodle."

Whether or not there was a trace of regret in what Brown said, would have been hard to determine.

"You mean if you'd had head enough to work a scheme of that kind!" Clover bluntly commented.

"We'll give you credit for the headwork, captain!" with a light and easy laugh. "But you mustn't deny that we were factors

in the thing. A head isn't of much use, unless it has hands!

"But you haven't said, yet, what Kimberley Ben's share is to be?"

The negro, who was an African by birth, and had spent several years in the great Kimberley diamond mines, was variously called by these cronies, Kimberley, Kimberley Ben, and Black Ben.

"Of course, I've not dared offer them yet to an expert," and Clover reflectively rubbed his beard. "But I take it they're worth not far from a hundred thousand. That's the estimate of the loss of Davenish & Company, given by to-day's papers."

He picked up a copy of the *Inter Ocean* of that morning, and turned curiously to the account of the robbery and of the death of Sidney Mayfield, which it contained.

"I don't build my estimate on that, but on what I know of the value of diamonds. According to that, Kimberley will have not far from fifteen or twenty thousand dollars. With a sum like that he can go back to his beloved Africa, and become the king of the highest cannibal tribe there."

He was growing jocular again, showing, beneath it, the subdued growl of a lion. Whether the air was assumed, for the purpose of impressing his associates with his fierceness and vindictiveness, would have been hard to say; for, at times, he became more lively, and the harshness, for the moment, disappeared altogether.

At any rate, these men stood in much awe of him, as was evinced by their deferential air.

Nothing was said, in this talk about diamonds, of how they had been obtained, except the mention of Davenish & Company; and nothing at all to show just how the robbery had been committed. Yet, there could be no doubt that these were the diamond thieves, whose late exploit had set all Chicago by the ears.

And there could be no doubt that one member of the villainous organization was Barton Brown, the lover of Stella Mayfield; the man whose marriage to Stella had been forbidden in so stern a manner by Mayfield, the elder.

"I suppose there will never be a way to recover the gem that had such an adventure with the duck?" Kimberley Ben queried, smiling over the recollection of the account of the singular chase that had come to him.

Captain Clover frowned.

"I think the loss of that stone can be laid to you, Ben! I don't know who else. I'm sure it didn't slip through *my* fingers. It was a mighty careless piece of work; and, besides the loss, may put some one on our trail."

"I didn't lose it, Captain Clover!" Ben responded. "You're off in that; and yet, I'm afraid that, or something, has already put the detective beagles on our track."

"You mean Chicago Charlie and that outfit?"

"I don't know if that's the name of the fellow; but I had a round with him this evening. He's been trailing me."

The information created some surprise, which was shown more by the nervous manner of Barton Brown than by the captain.

"He was lying for me in front of the mosque, in the shadows, to-night; and, thinks I, to myself, 'I'll just show you a trick worth two of that!' And I got out of there, and came back at him, after awhile, when I thought it dark enough, with the cord. I got it about his neck in beautiful shape, and would have had him, if he hadn't kicked me in the stomach and raised a row that brought some fellows up, on the run!"

"Of course I couldn't finish the job, but had to slide!"

The captain laughed, in his sarcastic way. "But I'll get him, if he tries the shadow business on *me*!" the black snarled, not relishing the manner in which his communication was received.

"It must have been the lunk-headed fool they call Chicago Charlie, the Columbian Detective. A fig for him! He thinks he's very smart, but he'll find out he's not smart enough to keep pace with Captain Clover."

"He's been employed by Davenish & Company to run the robbers down and get back the diamonds. He'll have a sweet old

time of it! I suppose he'd never dream of the sort of a hole we have down here. I know him well enough, and I'm not in the least bit scared by the fact that he's undertaken the job. These detectives are generally a set of bunglers, though they fancy they know so much!"

There was a hidden bitterness in the scornfully-spoken words that tended to convince one that Captain Clover was not so much at ease as he pretended to be.

"Probably he thinks we'll get scared, and make some fool break that will show him where we are; but if he thinks so, he'll find himself mistaken. We've got this hole down here, right under the much-talked-of White City; and here we'll stay, until we've raked in more than the Davenish diamonds."

"We've got bigger work than that ahead of us. Otherwise, I'd say, 'divide the swag and clear out.' But these diamonds don't satisfy my ambition. This is the year to strike way high, and I'm going to do it; and it'll take a good many Chicago Charlies to hold back my hands. Everybody's grabbing for money in this Columbian year, and we can't afford to let the procession leave us."

The boastful character of his words seemed to give new strength and courage to his followers; and that may have been his reason for speaking after that fashion.

At any rate, it could be seen that his influence over them was of rather a remarkable character: for they brightened, as he began to talk in that strain.

The genius of Captain Clover had brought the organization together, and the genius of Captain Clover now sustained and held it intact. The very boldness of the man hooked his villainous associates to him by bands stronger than steel; and as an originator of bold and daring schemes, the windy city by the great Michigan lake had never seen his equal.

CHAPTER X.

"GUNNISON GEORGE" TO THE FORE.

To return to Billy Stubbs.

The white man who had been talking to the negro, remained for some minutes quietly in the Zulu village, after the black had departed.

Then, as if satisfied the danger of discovery had passed, he turned again toward the high fence.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed, in subdued tones, stopping short.

Billy Stubbs trembled with an excitement that was not unmixed with fear.

The fellow's hands had dropped on the rope Billy had left swinging against the wall!

"What in thunder's the meanin' o' this?" came immediately the whispered question; to which, of course, the man did not expect an answer. "Some o' these here Zulus are a-playin' roots on the boss of their show. They've rigged up a little night stairway here, an' are slippin' out and into Midway for a lark. There'll be trouble come of it."

Billy did not hear all of this whispered comment, and was still shaking in fear.

"I reckon there won't be any harm, if I use it to swing myself over with. It's a wonder Kimberley didn't see this, fer he's got eyes like a cat. I don't think I ever seen jist sich another nigger. Ejicated 'way up to the top notch, to judge by his langwidge, an' still he says he come out of Afriky. I allus thought the niggers that come from there weren't as bright as they might be."

His hand was on the rope, and his eyes were roving over the Zulu village, for his suspicions were not entirely quiet, as he made these mental comments.

Still, there was apparently nothing to excite alarm. As he had said, it was reasonable to suppose some of the Zulus had placed the rope there. It was hardly reasonable, though, to think they would leave it in that position.

But the man, whose name was Tom Colwood, was not in all respects the shrewdest man in the world, though he was a great villain and fancied himself a very brainy fellow.

And when he had accounted for the presence of the rope to his own satisfaction, he

grasped it more firmly and climbed by means of it to the top of the wall.

There he permitted it to dangle, to the great relief of the newsboy spy, and swung himself down into Midway.

"That rope trick's a purty cute 'un," was his thought, as he turned down the street. "I'll have to tell Kimberley about that. I'll bet he never would have thought of it. We can rig up one, or steal that one, and climb into nighabout any place we choose."

He chuckled pleasedly at the thought, and walked on, all unaware that a keen-eyed trailer was on his track, and observing every movement.

Billy Stubbs had been considerably startled by the discovery which Tom Colwood had made, thinking trouble and danger would surely follow quickly on the heels of the discovery. But Colwood's actions showed him that the man had no true idea of the situation; and the newsboy's courage consequently returned.

Colwood had not gone ten yards, before Billy Stubbs was at the top of the wall, hugging it like a night-prowling cat, his eyes following the movements of the man. He had drawn up the rope and removed the noose from the point to which it had been attached, and stood ready to leap down into Midway, as soon as he might deem such an action safe.

Colwood was not ten rods away, and was still dimly to be seen, when Billy Stubbs dropped to the ground, recoiled the rope as he hurried on, and began an earnest pursuit.

He had heard enough that night to make him want to hear more. He had, as he believed, struck a trail that was worth following to the end; and his only regret was that he could not be two boys and two trailers at once, so that the movements of the black could also have been observed.

Colwood showed by his movements that he was very familiar with Midway Plaisance.

He crept in behind one of the German exhibits, made his way along the fence, and, scaling the fence, dropped down on the outside.

Billy Stubbs was so close behind him when he did this, that the former was able to see every movement, and even to hear some of the muttered words that dropped now and then from the fellow's lips.

And when he had gained the outside, and was moving on over the level ground that stretched on and on into the darkness, Billy Stubbs was still crowding him closely—so closely that on more than one occasion it seemed the boy was showing an unusual degree of recklessness.

Billy was not a little surprised, when he observed that the man's footsteps took him in the direction of the Wild West Show, then giving daily and nightly exhibitions in that vicinity. It was past the hour when any one would be likely to turn his footsteps in that direction.

Billy had already had some experiences in the Wild West exhibition conducted by Buffalo Bill—some experiences that had been pleasant, and some that had been very unpleasant—and his interest naturally increased when he saw that the man was heading for that point.

"I wonder what he's up to?" Billy kept muttering to himself, as he followed the man so stealthily and quietly. "It's too late for any one to want to go to the show!"

There could come no reply to these constant and useless questions.

But a full and complete reply came after a time, when the man reached the Wild West and entered the employees' quarters!

The fellow was connected with the exhibition! That was made known to the young police spy by the talk of bunks and meals which he immediately heard, as well as by the exclamation from some one, addressed to the man Billy had been following:

"That's your bunk over there, Tom Colwood! 'What in heaven's name are you monkeying about this bed for, anyway? I've been waked up twice since the show, and I'm getting tired of it!'"

There was a growling response from the man addressed as Tom Colwood, and Billy's keen ears told him the voice was the voice he had heard so short a time before in Midway Plaisance.

"Tom Colwood; and he belongs to the Wild West, and now he's bunkin' down for the night!" were the thoughts in Billy's mind.

"There's no use stayin' here any longer. I guess I'll git back, and make a report to Clingstone. Tom Colwood, of the Wild West! The night's work hain't been a failure, at any rate."

So important was this information deemed, by Chicago Charlie, that, accompanied by Billy Stubbs he proceeded to the Wild West, the next night, and obtained an interview with Buffalo Bill.

"I don't know much about this fellow, Colwood," said the great scout and showman, when Chicago Charlie had informed him of what Billy had discovered during the night.

"About all I know is that he came here from Arizona, a few days ago, and, as he showed himself handy with horses, I gave him a job in the stables. There can be no doubt that he's a cowboy; and, being a cowboy, and presumably, a comparative stranger in Chicago, I hardly see how he could have been mixed up in this diamond robbery, though I don't profess to know anything about it."

Having said this much, by way of explanation, Buffalo Bill announced his entire willingness to adopt any reasonable measures looking toward the revelation of Colwood's true character and the discovery of the authors of the double crime so lately committed in the Exposition.

"I'll tell you what!" he suggested, after a short talk. "That boy there, called by nearly everybody Billy Stubbs, is a fine rider—or, at least, has the making of a fine rider in him. I remember him well. I'll give him a position, where he can practice daily, and have the same privilege of the grounds as any member of our company, and that will enable him to keep an eye on this fellow, Colwood. How does that strike you?"

"I couldn't ask anything better, Colonel Cody!" was the reply of the Columbian Detective. "If there's anything wrong about Colwood—and we think there is—we'll not be long in finding out something about it."

"Well, young man," and Buffalo Bill took Billy Stubbs smilingly by the hand, "henceforth, in this show, you are Gunnison George, and a member of the Wild West. You've in you the making of a good rider; of that I'm fully satisfied; and I'll give you every opportunity for practice in that line. I've a pretty good opinion of your abilities; and in a very little while shall expect you to become quite a feature!"

Under this praise, which was not at all unmerited, Billy Stubbs blushed like a school-girl.

"I'll do my best, sir!" was his simple declaration.

"That's right! Always do your best! There never was any man in the world who could do better than that. The boy who always does his best—no matter what his work may be—is certain to go to the head of the procession. Always remember that, and act on it. It's the key to success!"

"I will, sir!" Billy promised, blushing profoundly. "I give you my word for it, sir, that I will!"

"Then Gunnison George, I shall be proud of you! Proud of you, even as I am proud of the Wild West; for it's always a pleasure to be proud of a success; and, if you live up to that promise, you will be a success!"

CHAPTER XI.

IN CLOSE QUARTERS.

THE discovery which Billy Stubbs had made in the Zulu village was extremely stimulating and comforting to Chicago Charlie. It was convincing proof that his seemingly wild belief that some one connected with the Zulu colony knew more or less concerning the great diamond robbery had good foundation.

Thinking it over, as he walked away from the Wild West, after his successful interview with Buffalo Bill, he decided to visit the Zulu colony, and take a look about the place for himself.

"That boy is proving himself a jewel!"

was his reflection, as he picked his way along toward the Columbian Exposition. "He's shown himself from first to last a born detective. I could spare almost any one better than Billy Stubbs. And I haven't the slightest doubt he'll make it exceedingly uncomfortable for Mr. Tom Colwood, before many days have passed."

Showing his pass, he was admitted into the grounds, and strolled leisurely into Midway Plaisance, keeping his eyes about him and his senses wide awake.

He walked beneath the shadows of the mosque, but those who had sought his life there the previous night were nowhere present. The Germans who had lent their kindly assistance, were also gone, and new faces and new forms swarmed everywhere.

It was only what Chicago Charlie expected. The tide of humanity poured in constantly changing currents in and out of the gates of the biggest show of the century; and it was little less than a marvel when one encountered the same faces daily at the same place.

The Columbian Detective did not immediately visit the Zulu exhibit; but hung about Midway, in the neighborhood of the cafes, until the hour grew late.

Then, instead of passing into the Zulu village by the proper entrance, as he might have done, he stealthily mounted the high fence and slipped in.

He did not desire to be seen, for he feared that his work was already becoming known to the men he was shadowing; and, should they be made aware that he was in that place, they might lay some plan to trap him, either in there or when he came out. Besides, he believed he could prosecute his work better by going about it in this stealthy way.

Once inside the village, he seemed to have dropped into some Zulu kraal in the heart of South Africa. Zulus were everywhere; some asleep, and some still awake and talking volubly in their strange tongue.

The Columbian Detective took care to keep well out of sight; and finally ensconced himself under a bale of loose goods, where he could see and hear without much danger of discovery.

He was hoping for the return of the black, whose talk with Tom Colwood had so engrossed the attention of the newsboy spy on the previous night.

The black came; but Colwood did not meet him there on that occasion; nor did the black tarry a great while.

Chicago Charlie did not see Kimberley come in, nor did he see him go out. He became aware, after a time, however, that Kimberley Ben had disappeared; and, seeing that further delay there was likely to prove a useless waste of time, he rose to make his departure.

In doing so, he made a false step, that came near proving fatal to his plans, if not fatal to himself.

He was walking quietly toward the high wall, with the intention of re-climbing it and descending into Midway, when he struck the toe of his foot against a black object on the ground.

It proved to be the shoulder of a Zulu; and, as the toe came in contact with his flesh, the Zulu lifted himself with an angry yell; and, grasping an assagai that hung near, launched it at the head of the disturber of his slumbers.

Chicago Charlie dodged the flying weapon; and, seeing that discovery must come if he tarried, he leaped aside and scudded like a rabbit for the fence.

The yell of the Zulu awoke the echoes in Midway, bringing a score of his dusky friends tumbling out to see what was the matter; and these, catching sight of the form of the fleeing white man, grasped their weapons, as if they expected an invasion of the sacred precincts of the village.

For a moment assagais flashed and hissed like screaming and fiery serpents. But they flew without much accuracy of aim. A dozen stuck in the fence, up which Chicago Charlie was hastily scrambling, but fortunately none touched his flesh.

A war between cannibal tribes seemed suddenly to have broken out in the heart of Midway Plaisance, so shrill and tumultuous did the yells resound.

But Chicago Charlie leaped down with the agility and speed of a flying squirrel; and,

observing that a crowd of Columbian guards were hurrying up, attracted by the cries, he ran up the street, and took refuge in some friendly shadows.

From this shelter he emerged in a few moments; and, joining the half-frightened Columbian guards, he walked into the Zulu village by way of the gate, to satisfy his curiosity.

The entire village was astir; and the fiery black warriors from Zululand were giving much trouble to the men who had brought them over the stormy wastes of the ocean, and now had them in charge.

They could scarcely be made to believe that a lot of white men had not tried to raid and loot the village, and were with much difficulty pacified.

But under the injunctions and persuasions of their conductors, they finally gathered up their scattered weapons; and once more retired to sleep, perchance to dream of further disturbances.

"They're a dangerous lot to fool with!" was the thought of the Columbian Detective, as he watched these many proceedings. "I didn't think they would be. I'll have to warn Billy Stubbs, or he may get himself killed in here some night. A savage is a savage, whether he's in the mountains of Arizona, on African sands, or corralled here in Chicago."

CHAPTER XII.

LILLY LILAC AS A POLICE SPY.

LILLY LILAC, with the Infant Wonder, the small bit of humanity she had adopted as her own and from whom she refused to be parted, were duly installed in the home of the Mayfields. Perhaps the singular should be used here, for there was now since the death of Sidney Mayfield, only one of that name; always excepting Uncle Steve, who had so recently become a member of the Columbian Quartette.

Miss Lilly had not accepted this position without many misgivings. She did not fancy the work of a police spy, in the first place; and in the second, she was compelled to give up her position in a kindergarten establishment to which she had become much attached.

But the wish of Chicago Charlie was almost as a command to her.

She had found no difficulty in securing the place, for she carried recommendations of a first-class character.

Jack Rackstraw had not acquiesced in her decision with very good grace. He was willing to obey the orders of Chicago Charlie, as far as they pertained to himself; but his grumblings were many, when Miss Lilly was thus summoned into the service of the Columbian Detective.

But Jack Rackstraw's remonstrances availed nothing.

It was a bold step for Lilly Lilac to take, and it is scarcely to be wondered that Rackstraw had opposed it. But Miss Lilly was courageous, whenever she made up her mind to be so.

As for the Infant Wonder he was, as a healthy child should be, happy anywhere.

The character of Stella Mayfield furnished Lilly a source of constant study. She was quick to see that Stella was a vain, foolish thing, led oftener by her emotions and feelings than by sound judgment. Yet Lilly could scarcely make herself believe that Stella was a girl who could be guilty of so terrible a deed as the murder of her brother. Lilly was loth to think that any member of her sex would commit such a crime.

Lilly's espionage, conducted in a quiet and discreet way, seemed likely to reveal nothing, after all. After Sidney Mayfield had been laid to rest in the cemetery, Stella resumed her shopping and her calls; and, except for the absence of the brother, life went on in the handsome house very much as it must have done before.

Uncle Steve made the place his home; and came and went, visiting the great Exposition daily.

To Lilly, Uncle Steve was a broad-shouldered, whole-souled fellow, who attracted her by the oddity of his talk and the rural simplicity of his manner. She had never seen another just like him; and his round, moon-shaped face, set in its aureole of

whiskers, was always to her a pleasant sight.

And Uncle Steve took, what he called, "a great shine" to Lilly; and his eyes watched her with a pleasant light, as she came and went about the house, busy with her tasks, or playing with the Infant Wonder.

To Uncle Steve, the Infant Wonder was really a remarkable child; and the boy's prattle seemed to delight him immensely. He became a "horse," for the amusement of Christopher Columbus Stubbs; and every morning, before going down to the big show, he hoisted that small monarch to his shoulders and trotted clumsily with him about the grounds.

This was a thing to please Lilly Lilac; for to the man or the creature that thought well of the Infant Wonder, she gave a warm place in her regards.

As the days slipped by, without anything of a suspicious character coming within the scope of her vision, Lilly Lilac began to feel that she was doing a wicked thing in thus spying in the house of these new friends. She compared herself to the snake in Eden; and managed many times to make herself uncomfortable.

"I don't think I can stand it much longer!" she thought, as she dabbed at a fly with a cloth, and threw open a screen door. "I just don't! This spying is a mean business, anyhow. If Jack Rackstraw don't quit it, I'll—I'll desert him for Uncle Steve!"

She smiled, as she thought of Uncle Steve, for the old man had been especially kind to her that morning.

Then her thoughts again took a serious turn.

"I don't like it here, at all, and I just don't believe I can stay. That idea of Mr. Clingstone's is silly, anyway. I thought there might be something in it, at first; but, now, I know there ain't. Stella Mayfield's a little goose, but she wouldn't have done that!"

"If she wouldn't let that Barton Brown come to see her all the time, I'd think more of her. He's a scamp! But you can't tell any thing to a girl like Stella: for that kind of a girl knows it all. I don't doubt she thinks Barton Brown is an angel, ready to sprout wings. Oh, my! these flies are just dreadful. The Infant Wonder's had the door standing open again! I'll spank him, if he don't quit it; see if I don't!"

All the time she was dabbing at the flies with the cloth, in an endeavor to free the room of the pests.

But Miss Lilly Lilac lost her desire to leave the Mayfield house, before another day rolled over her head; and what she heard made her think that, after all, there might be something in the idea advanced by Chicago Charlie.

Barton Brown called that night. In fact, Barton Brown was a frequent caller, in the days immediately following the death of Sidney Mayfield; probably from a very natural desire to make up for lost time. The house had been forbidden him by Sidney; and before the latter's death he had been forced to meet Stella by stealth. That he could visit the house openly, with no one to molest or make afraid, was a source of much satisfaction.

Lilly Lilac had entered the linen closet in the dining-room,—not with any intention of spying,—for Stella Mayfield and Burton Brown were not in the room at the moment.

The room was dimly lighted, for the time was after nightfall.

Barton and Stella entered, while Lilly was thus engaged, and the man's words riveted her attention.

They had come thither from the parlor, as if with a desire to escape observation.

"As I've told you before, Stella, I think I'll have to slide out of this region; and may be compelled to do it on pretty short notice!" Barton Brown was saying. "Already, some police officers have been trying to make my acquaintance; and it's likely their attentions will grow rather too fervid to suit me."

"You know what I said to you the other day? I told you I wanted you to get ready to leave with me at any time. You've had time enough, now, to think it over."

When they entered the room, Lilly Lilac was on the point of retreating from the closet; and would have done so, had not those words reached her.

Now she did not desire to do any thing of

that kind; but stood perfectly still, in her place of concealment, trembling from a very excess of excitement.

The door of the linen closet was slightly ajar. She would have been better pleased with it closed, but she dared not reach forth her hand to move it.

A sense of guiltiness swept in a hot flush over her face. She could not resist the feeling that she was doing a despicable thing. In all her life, Lilly Lilac had never before been guilty of eavesdropping. It was a thing she had always detested. It seemed so base and low, to thus take advantage of another, even though that other was a criminal, and the advantage taken for the purpose of righting wrongs and bringing the evil-doer to justice.

Nor could she shake off this deep-seated conviction, now; but she strove to ease her conscience by assuring herself that this was not the sort of eavesdropping she had always despised; that the eavesdropping she had hated was of the kind indulged in by gossipers and meddlers.

It was scarcely satisfying, but it answered for the moment; and Barton Brown's talk served to drive away the uneasy feeling.

A minute later, she could scarcely have retreated had she desired to, without creating distrust.

"You are only frightened, Barton," was Stella Mayfield's reply. "Still, whenever you think it is necessary to leave, I am willing to go with you, even unto the ends of the earth. For you know that I love you, Barton! I sometimes fear that I am the poor, silly thing, that father and Sidney declared me to be! but I can't help loving you; and I don't want to help it!"

They had taken seats but a few paces from the linen closet, and Lilly Lilac almost feared to breathe. She was trembling in every limb; and her fingers, as they came in contact with the wall, rattled like castanets. She started, almost sure the sound had reached the pair.

"I only hope I am frightened, and no more!" Brown earnestly asserted. "A little scare won't do much harm. But I've good reason to think that my footsteps are being dogged. If I was dead sure of it I'd want to slope this very night. As it is, though, I'm going to remain till I'm certain on the point."

"And, maybe, then it will be too late! A curse on these spies, anyway!"

It was very manifest from his tones that he was shaky with fear; and the singular thing about it, was, that on this occasion, Stella Mayfield, who usually was considered timid, and who relied so wholly on the judgment of Barton Brown, should become the bravest of the two and strive to quiet and console him.

It was but another evidence of the courage so often born in woman by a great love.

Barton Brown was a base scamp, unworthy the love of any woman. Whether Stella Mayfield was guilty, could not yet be determined; but, guilty as she might be, she was far too good to lavish affection on Brown. The love of the vilest woman on earth would have been too good for him.

He was a man of dashing appearance, a good dresser, and, to all outward seeming, a gentleman; and it may have been these superficial qualities that drew Stella Mayfield to him.

Lilly Lilac was sure of one thing, though, as she stood thus, a trembling listener.

Barton Brown feared the police, for some good and sufficient reason; and the knowledge of whatever crime he had committed and which made him thus afraid, was shared by the girl.

And she asked herself, if it could be possible that the two had really committed the murder and robbery in that big Exposition building?

It was a startling thought, which, heretofore, she had refused to harbor; even though Chicago Charlie had told her of Stella's queer actions and looks when the latter caught sight of the bottle of poison on the surgeon's table.

Finding her position in the closet becoming cramped and uncomfortable, Lilly Lilac sought to change it slightly, and, in doing so, displaced a pile of linen, that fell to the floor with a dull thud.

Believing discovery to be inevitable, Lilly's heart was in her mouth.

"What was that?" Barton questioned, getting up from his chair.

But a happy fate averted the impending disaster.

A cat scudded by.

"A curse on that cat! How it scared me!" Barton declared, going back to his seat. "I was just ready to believe that some one was in there!"

Lilly Lilac was ready to cry out, so overwrought were her nerves. She had never before felt herself in such deadly peril, and the fear that oppressed her was almost overpowering.

"Oh, if I was only out of here!" was her mental wail.

But Barton Brown and Stella Mayfield were talking again, and she dared not move.

For nearly an hour, thereafter, they continued their conversation, while Lilly choked and shivered in the linen closet, frightened almost into hysterics.

Then Brown arose to go, and Stella accompanied him.

"You'll never catch me in a trap like that, again, soon," Miss Lilly breathed, as she came out of her stuffy prison. "If my hair hasn't turned gray, it will be a wonder!"

Her face was as white as the moonlight that played over it, and she was so weak she could scarcely walk.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE GREEN-EYED MONSTER.

THERE were two things that could always make Rackstraw happy. One of these was to be on the water, in a stanch vessel; and the other was to be with Miss Lilly Lilac.

Therefore, he ought to have been doubly happy, on that bright afternoon in midsummer; for Lilly Lilac was at his side, and the dimpling blue of the lake lay stretched about them.

They were on their way from the city to the Columbian Exposition; and had chosen to take passage on one of the vessels of the World's Fair Steamship Company, for thereby they avoided the dust incident to travel by the cable and railway lines.

The steamer was the new "whaleback," Christopher Columbia; the first whaleback passenger boat ever built; and the beauty and grace of its outlines was not the least of its novel charms.

Jack Rackstraw had more than once inspected it, viewing it with the critical eye of a sailor; and had pronounced it as handsome a thing as ever floated the lakes.

A brisk breeze from the water made the lake ride delightfully cool; and Miss Lilly and Rackstraw sat in comfortable chairs on the middle deck, giving languid attention to the shore line, with its miles and miles of tall houses.

The outlook lakeward was most enchanting. The waves curled into green rollers, playfully chasing each other; and the many sailing vessels, with here and there a penciled line of smoke indicating the position of a steamer, filled up and rounded out a pleasing picture.

But for all that, Jack Rackstraw was not happy; and his uneasiness was apparent, though he had for a long time striven to conceal it.

The truth was, that the honest sailor was beginning to harbor that most tormenting of demons—jealousy.

The feeling had been growing on him for several days; and now it had become a constant and depressing burden.

Time and again he had cursed the hour when Lilly Lilac had acceded to the wishes of Chicago Charlie and entered the Mayfield home. For he dated his loss of happiness from that hour. Until then, he had never doubted the affection and constancy of the woman who had promised to become his wife. He had never dreamed that he could carry such doubts. Now, they clung to him with a tormenting persistence.

There may have been no cause at all for this jealousy, but Jack Rackstraw believed, or rather feared, there was; and that was all-sufficient. Jealousy thrives on suspicion.

And it was all on account of Uncle Stephen Mayfield.

Stephen Mayfield, it will be remembered, was making his home at the Mayfield residence.

Rackstraw held a berth on the steamer, Andrew Johnson, that was engaged in revenue service, and lay for the most part anchored in the Exposition waters.

Therefore, Jack had not the opportunities to see and talk to Lilly, that were accorded by this arrangement to Uncle Steve.

"I don't like it, the way you and that there country jay is a-carryin' on!" he growled, at length, when Lilly Lilac rallied him on his moroseness. "I didn't 'low to say anything about it; but, if you want to know jist what's the matter, that's it! I don't like it a-tall!"

Lilly turned on him a surprised glance, and then gave way to a merry outburst of laughter.

"Jealous! Fie! Fie! Jack Rackstraw! Who'd have thought it, of *you*?"

"I reckon I'm a man, same as any other; an' there don't anybody take, as you may say, kindly to that! Why, you're a-talkin' an' a-flirtin' with him in the garden there, ever' blessed evenin'!"

Lilly laughed again, so uproariously that the attention of many of the passengers was attracted; whereat, Rackstraw frowned more blackly than ever.

"Why, he's old enough to be—to be my father, nearly!"

"Well, I hain't so blessed young, myself!" Rackstraw blurted.

This had indeed been a tender point with the sailor, though he had never before spoken of it so directly. He was many years older than Lilly Lilac and felt keenly the disparity in their ages.

This sudden outbreak on the part of Jack Rackstraw seemed to furnish Lilly much amusement. That Jack Rackstraw could become jealous, she had not counted among the possibilities.

"Flirting?" she questioned, speaking cautiously behind her fan. "How did you come to see me talking with Uncle Steve in the garden?"

Rackstraw's anger was of the mild type, and a pleasant look from Lilly could quickly put it to flight.

"You know, of course, that I'm puttin' in the hull of my days and my nights, as you may say, a-follerin' that there Barton Brown; and Barton Brown's been a-ha'ntin' that house a good 'eal, lately! He's got a sweet-heart there, same as I have; an' every night, when I camp on his trail, it takes me to that house. That's how I happened to see you.

"Fer the love o' heaven, Lilly! I hope you'll not go to tantalizin' me by encouragin' of the attention of that fool clod-hopper from Dakoty! He's one o' the Columbian Quartette, as Clingstone calls the four of us; but, jist the same, that don't give him no license to try an' make love to you. I hope ye'll put yer foot down on it."

Rackstraw grew earnest, as he uttered this protest.

"We ain't married yet, Jack!" Lilly asserted, with a saucy toss of her shapely head. "When we are, I'll allow that you've a right to order my goings and comings in a matter of that kind. But we ain't married yet, Jack."

"And hanged if I ain't afraid we never will be, if that's going to keep up!" Rackstraw growled, dropping again into somberness.

There was a suggestion of nervousness in the merry laugh with which Lilly Lilac greeted this statement; but she would not give the promise Rackstraw desired; and, in consequence, the pleasure of the day was spoiled for the honest sailor.

The talk drifted to other matters, but the thought of Uncle Steve Mayfield arose constantly to poison the delight of this visit to the Exposition.

CHAPTER XIV.

UNCLE STEPHEN MAKING HAY.

If Jack Rackstraw could have looked into the little arbor in the small garden back of the Mayfield residence at an early hour that evening, he would have felt that he had abundant cause for the most violent jealousy.

The descending sun cast long shadows and made fanciful and swaying patterns on the

smooth carpet of green grass. The odor of flowers was in the air, and young grapes hung on the trellised vines.

Lilly Lilac and Uncle Stephen Mayfield were seated in this arbor; not, however, side by side; and the Infant Wonder was playing near them.

The farmer from the Dakota plains seemed to be in the best of humors, and at peace with himself and all the world. Nevertheless, as he was willing to confess, his efforts as a Columbian Detective had, so far, brought no brilliant results.

He was becoming skeptical as to the final success of the Quartette.

Perhaps for that reason, he seemed to be turning his thoughts in another direction; and, to judge by his frequent amorous glances, Lilly Lilac was the center of those thoughts.

"The more I see of this hyer Chicago, the more I don't like it!" he was saying. "This hyer trip has cooked me; an' I don't 'low that you'll ever ketch yer Uncle Steve ag'in in any place that's bigger than Jintown, North Dakoty. That Red River country, up there, is the garden spot o' the world; an' as fer wheat—Number 1, hard—it kin jist beat all creation. An' a wheat field, a-wavin' and a-glistenin' in the sun, an' a turnin' yaller an' a-bulgin' with its bushels an' bushels o' grain, is, with one exception, the purtiest thing on the face of the earth."

He turned his eyes again to Miss Lilly.

"Do you want to know what that exception is? It's a good-lookin' woman of about your heft!"

Lilly Lilac blushed under the compliment.

"Comparing a woman to a wheat field!"

"Well, if there's anything purtier than them two, I hain't yit set these eyes on it. Them's the sentiments o' yer Uncle Stephen!"

"I'm afraid you're a base flatterer, Uncle Steve; and I heard even worse things said of you to-day."

"Sho, now!" an' Uncle Steve's eyes opened in wide surprise. "Mebbe you'd be willin', now, to tell what it was that you heered? When compliments is passed on me—which they don't generlly come as thick as flies in August—I like to know what they air."

Miss Lilly resolutely shook her head.

"It wouldn't do to tell you, I'm afraid. It might make you vain. You're *such* a flatterer, anyway!"

Uncle Steve's countenance took on a dubious look.

"I kin never foller you, edzactly, Miss Lilly. You're like the snake o' the western story!"

Miss Lilly gave a little jump; it brought back so strongly to her mind her thoughts and experiences in the linen closet.

She eyed Uncle Stephen closely beneath her lashes, before replying:

"How's that? Why am I like a snake?"

The countryman laughed, in his hoarse way.

"I didn't mean that you was like a snake; though I've seen some tarnal purty ones. I jist meant that in an argyment er a conversation you was as hard to foller as a snake."

"Didn't you never hear the rhyme? It's a rhyme; an' I ain't, to say, good at rhymes. But it's all to the effec' that no one could tell, whether the snake that made the track was goin' north er comin' back."

"I've been a-thinkin' o' North Dakoty, Miss Lilly. Of Jintown, an' the Red River valley, and the big wheat fields an' the slick cattle!"

"And the hot winds and hot sun, and no shade and no nothin'!"

"There you go, a-sp'ilin' my purty picter!" and Uncle Stephen grinned. "There is, as you may say, a few things missin' up in North Dakoty; an', when I git back there, I reckon there'll be somethin' else missin'; an' Uncle Steve'll feel as lonesome as a grass-hopper at the nippin' o' frost."

Lilly had no reply to this, and he continued:

"I won't have *you* to set 'round and look han'some, an' make me feel young ag'in."

"No, I don't think you will, Uncle Steve. I don't have any desire to go to Dakoty."

Uncle Steve sighed and looked hard at his dusty shoes.

"There is, to say, some drawbacks; but it's a mighty purty country up there!" he urged.

"When the blizzards are howling!" Miss Lilly interjected.

"They don't howl all the time, even in winter!" Uncle Stephen asseverated, giving his head a dogged shake. "You're a-makin' it out *too* bad. Don't you reckon you could think well of the Red River country, considerin' of the good hard wheat and the good hard dollars it turns out? I'd rather live there than hyer in Chicago; and dollars'll make a home purty anywhere. You see the p'int I'm tryin' to git at?"

"You've approached it several times, Uncle Steve, and I can tell you that it's of no use. I like you as a friend. But not as—"

Uncle Steve sighed again.

"I want us to be the best of friends, Uncle Steve; but I don't take any stock in your nonsense!" more kindly.

The Dakotan brightened and drew his chair closer.

"Then you ain't goin' to tell me that I must go away an' quit talkin' to you all together? I was afeard you would. I'm an old bear, Miss Lilly, an' rough, an' all that; but, somehow er ruther, I can't he'p thinkin' of you the whole day long. Do you reckon you could love an old bear like me, jist a little?"

He had plunged impetuously along; and now he ventured to lift her hand to his lips.

It was a most unfortunate movement at a most unfortunate time; for, at that moment, Jack Rackstraw turned an angle of the house, and took in the whole scene at one swift glance.

The face of the honest sailor whitened. But he said not a word. All he did was to turn on his heel and walk away as quietly as he had come.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SHADOW ON THE BOAT.

OUT on the lake, in front of the White City, as the collection of Exposition buildings has come to be called, lay the police patrol boat. It was a launch, used for the purpose of patrolling the waters of the Exposition; the service having been established by the Chicago Police Department.

As Chicago Charlie's present work lay now almost wholly within the Exposition grounds, he had established his headquarters on this patrol launch; and there, of an evening, he might often have been seen.

Uncle Steve Mayfield and Jack Rackstraw were with him on the boat, the night succeeding the events just described.

As may be fancied, Jack Rackstraw had no very good feelings for Uncle Steve Mayfield. Jack Rackstraw was managing to conceal this, in a most remarkable manner, from the man he was learning to hate. Perhaps Rackstraw's police experiences served to aid him in this.

He and Uncle Steve seemed to be on the best of terms, this evening; and for a long time they had paraded up and down the small deck of the vessel, discussing the weather and the show, and now and then touching on the work of the Columbian Quartette.

Uncle Stephen was in the best of spirits; though he could not resist his tendency to rail at Chicago and Chicago affairs in general, and the great Exposition in particular. But this railing had become such a habit with Uncle Steve, that few of his acquaintances paid any attention to it.

The night was of the darkest, and the patrol boat was swinging idly at anchor; though a trip down the lake was contemplated an hour or two later.

Matters had been very quiet in the Exposition waters for a number of days, and the police officers on the launch had had very little to do.

Mayfield and Jack Rackstraw were talking of returning ashore, when a cry came from far down the lake; and, as it seemed a call of distress, the launch immediately got under way and headed in that direction.

Her search-light cast a cone of fiery rays over the surface of the water; but, though she proceeded to the point from which the cry seemed to have come, nothing was to be discovered. The surface of the bay lay blank and black, enlivened only by the running waves.

The launch bi-sected the point a number of times, cruising round and round; and then turned back toward the starting point.

The false alarm had created much excitement; and the crew, with Chicago Charlie and his associates, had crowded forward. But, when it was made plain that nothing was to be discovered, they separated again.

The Columbian Detective walked to the stern of the launch, and stood for a considerable time looking down at the parting waters, as they churned and hissed under the impulse of the screw.

He was thinking of the call that had been heard; and from that his thoughts roved to the work that so much engrossed his attention.

He was compelled to confess that, so far, little enough had been accomplished by the Columbian Quartette. A number of men were being shadowed, but the results had been meager. With the exception of the conversation overheard by Billy Stubbs in the Zulu colony, there had been nothing of a very promising character.

Thus occupied, Chicago Charlie failed to see the shadow that slipped toward him across the deck. It was a murderously-minded shadow, too, to judge by its attitude and bearing. And, strangest of all, it bore a remarkable resemblance to Captain Clover, the leader of the diamond thieves.

Even if Chicago Charlie had seen this stealthy, gliding figure, he would not have known who it was, for Captain Clover's features had not yet been revealed to him.

But Chicago Charlie did not see it, nor hear its approach.

A point of light, emitted by a distant lamp, fell athwart the deck, and through it the figure passed, again hastening into the gloom, to escape discovery.

That point of light, falling momentarily on the face or the shadow, showed that it was Captain Clover, beyond all doubt.

It showed, too, that Captain Clover held in his right hand a weapon strongly resembling the dreaded sand-bag.

Still, Chicago Charlie did not look up, nor change his position; nor did he become aware of the proximity of this foe, until a stunning blow fell against the side of his head, knocking him from the boat into the water.

Had the blow fallen where it was intended to fall by Captain Clover, the work of the Columbian Detective would have been brought to a sudden end. But, as it chanced, it did not strike fairly, though its force was stunning.

The splash, as Chicago Charlie pitched headforemost into the lake, was heard by some member of the crew, and an alarm was immediately sounded. The launch was brought to a full stop.

No one knew who had fallen overboard, and it was a general supposition that the fall had been accidental. But ropes were thrown out and a boat was lowered, into which several men instantly sprung.

Jack Rackstraw was among these, he having been almost the first man to respond to the alarm; and it was Jack Rackstraw's keen eyes that spied the head of the detective, as it came slowly to the surface; and it was Jack Rackstraw's strong right hand that grasped the unconscious and drowning man.

The search-light in the bow of the launch—for the vessel had turned about—was directed full on the scene; and when Jack Rackstraw saw whose was the face and form he had drawn from a watery grave, he reeled back with such a gasp of astonishment that he came near letting Chicago Charlie slip again into the water.

"May I be blowed!" was his ejaculation.

Other hands were reached forth to assist him; and in a very short time the detective was in the boat, and back on the launch.

The captain and crew, as well as Uncle Steve Mayfield, were as astonished a set of men as could have been found in many a day.

And their astonishment did not decrease, when an examination showed the bruises and swollen place on the detective's head, and they had discovered the sand-bagging instrument that did the work.

This had been dropped by Captain Clover, as he turned in flight.

Chicago Charlie's condition was not seri-

ous, owing to the instant alarm and prompt work of rescue by the patrol crew, but it was many minutes before he had sufficiently recovered to give an account of what had befallen him.

Then, the account was very meager and unsatisfactory.

He had felt the dull pain of the blow, but had known nothing else until he was restored to consciousness on the launch.

It was plain, however, that he had been struck on the head, with murderous intent; and a search of the vessel was immediately made for the one who had dealt the blow.

But Captain Clover had escaped as silently as he had come, and the search proved fruitless.

It was an unsolvable mystery to the men on the launch, and it troubled the captain not a little. That any one could have boarded the launch in that manner, and left it without exhibiting any trace or sign other than the work he had done, the captain would not have believed.

But Captain Clover had come and Captain Clover had gone, as quietly as the flitting shadow; though the work which Captain Clover had hoped to accomplish had fortunately failed of execution.

CHAPTER XVI.

A BIT OF EXCITEMENT.

BILLY STUBBS was having a lively time in the endeavor to conquer the little buckskin cayuse which Buffalo Bill had turned over to him. The pony was a thing of beauty, but not a joy forever. It was as wiry and unreliable as a pony ever gets to be, and had given Billy Stubbs no end of trouble.

As is usual, on such occasions, when a pony is trying to stand on his head and on his tail at one and the same time, and its rider is clinging to him like a chestnut burr to the back of a sheep, a big crowd had gathered; and those composing the crowd were offering Billy Stubbs a good many bits of sage advice, mixed with much laughter.

The antics of the pony and Billy were, in fact, furnishing a "picnic" for the idle members of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, that morning.

Billy Stubbs, however, retained his temper, and endeavored to hurl back as good as was sent; and all the while his attention was occupied by the antics of the pony.

As one of the men declared, the cayuse was a "bucker from wayback." It arched its back like a fighting cat, and, leaping sidewise, and straight up and down, gave the rider such a series of jolts as he had never had in all his youthful experience.

This performance was at this interesting stage, when a great cry arose, to which was added a shout of excitement, and the cowboys abandoned the buckskin pony and Billy Stubbs, and hurried to a scene of greater interest.

Almost hourly, the winner of the great cowboy race, which began at Chadron, Nebraska, and ended in the Wild West grounds, in Chicago, had been expected to make his appearance; and now it was known the winner had arrived.

It was John Berry, who, on his little chestnut stallion, Poison, had made the last 140 miles, from Freeport, Illinois, in just twenty-four hours.

Berry was scarcely able to dismount, after his long ride, and he could hardly lift himself to grasp the hand of Colonel Cody, who gave him a most cordial welcome.

After that, scant attention was paid to Billy Stubbs.

Billy had managed to get off the back of the buckskin, in some manner, and had joined the crowd gathered about the triumphant cowboy, in front of Buffalo Bill's tent; and, with boyish eagerness, had watched the gallant pony which Berry had ridden, as it was led away to be groomed and fed, and to be as carefully cared for as if it had been a child.

Then Billy returned to his practice and to his task of conquering the vicious buckskin cayuse, which promised to give him as much work, of a most active kind, as he could desire, for many days.

No whooping and calling crowd collected around him, this time, for the attention of the cowboys of the Wild West were now drawn in another direction. In some re-

spects, this was most gratifying to the boy. He fancied the cayuse was not inclined to be so vicious, when not thus surrounded.

But he quickly became aware that something had gone wrong. When he pulled on the bridle, in an endeavor to restrain the prancing pony, the bridle came off like a rotten rope.

Finding itself free, the animal gave one wild bound, that almost hurled Billy from the saddle to the ground.

The boy's face whitened with a sense of fear.

"Whoa!" he cried, his voice shaking from nervousness.

He grasped the saddle-horn, as the pony gave another bound. He was powerless to do more, however; and, realizing that he was in imminent peril, he shouted aloud for help.

If he had been a more skillful rider he might have leaped down; but that seemed to him a more dangerous proceeding than the endeavor to stay where he was.

The buckskin cayuse seemed to realize its advantage, and pranced and danced, and raced and whirled, and executed hornpipes without number.

Then it laid back its ears and darted at a high post, which it grazed, in an effort to rub or squeeze its rider.

There is no doubt the affair would have had a sad termination, for Billy was losing his presence of mind.

But his calls brought aid, at a time when he needed it most sorely.

Buffalo Bill came running up on foot, with a lariat trailing at his heels. He stopped when he reached the post against which the pony had rubbed so savagely. The animal was forty or fifty feet from the post by that time, and increasing the distance.

In a snaky fold, the lariat shot through the air, uncoiling as it went, like a striking serpent. The hissing noose came down over the head of the bounding cayuse; and then the animal came to a full stop, reared, pawed the air with his fore feet and fell heavily over on its side.

Immediately after casting the rope, Cody had taken a dexterous turn of it about the post; and the cayuse had been irresistibly thrown from its feet.

Billy Stubbs was shot out of the saddle like a ball out of a cannon's mouth. But he struck the ground unhurt, and scrambled up quickly, a forced smile on his lips. He was ashy white, and shaking in every limb.

The prancing pony came to a dead stand when it got on its feet, doubtless realizing that further lively performances were useless.

"My young man, you will have to learn a thing or two, in the handling of bronchos!" Cody exclaimed, with something of severity. "How did that beast get his bridle off?"

"I don't know, sir!" Billy stammered. "I pulled on it and it broke."

"Broke?"

The tone was incredulous.

"Yes, sir! Broke! It broke when I pulled on it."

The bridles used by the rough riders of Buffalo Bill's Wild West were not given to breaking in times of emergency, so there is little wonder that Cody was astonished at boy's answer.

He stepped over to where the bridle lay on the ground, and, picking it up, looked at it. "It's been cut!" he declared. "Who's been fooling about your pony?"

An angry flush swept over his face.

"No one, sir, so far as I know. I didn't see any one near it. But when Mr. Berry came in awhile ago, and the cowboys all crowded over there, I went, too."

"And your pony was left alone?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then some one came here while you were away, and cut this bridle. There can be no question that it was cut. You can see that, yourself."

Billy looked at it curiously. The marks of the knife were plainly to be seen.

One name was in the thought of both.

"Tom Colwood!"

Billy Stubbs, however, hesitated to speak the name, and waited for Buffalo Bill.

"Some one has done this who wanted to injure you. Probably, some one who wanted to get you killed."

He looked closely at the boy.

"Yes, sir; I think so, too!"

"Of course, you know who I mean! There's only one man here who could possibly want to injure you. It is the man you came here to watch."

They were standing near together, and he spoke in guarded tones.

"Keep quiet about this, and I will speak of it to no one. I was about convinced, at first, that your detective friend, Mr. Clingstone, was mistaken in his estimate of Tom Colwood. It would seem now that he was pretty nearly correct. We don't know that Colwood did this; but I have no hesitancy in saying that whoever did it is a grand scoundrel. No cowboy, with a spark of cowboy manhood about him, would be guilty of such a thing!"

"But just keep quiet about it, and go about with your eyes open. Look out for traps, too. The man that did this will do as much again, or even worse."

He tossed the bridle away, and turned to the buckskin pony.

Then he sent Billy Stubbs for another bridle, that the practice riding and the work of subduing the cayuse might be continued.

It had been a most dangerous scheme against the life of the boy, and Cody's anger was aroused, as well as his suspicion; and he resolved that he would, himself, keep an eye out for Tom Colwood; and endeavor to be ready to render the boy assistance, should it at any time become necessary.

Billy Stubbs showed the tenacious courage which dominated his character by going back to the contest with the cayuse; though his nerves were shaking and his mind was teeming with many thoughts and theories concerning the supposed author of the outrage.

"Mr. Cody is right," he muttered. "If Tom Colwood done that, he'll show his dirty hand again, before long!"

CHAPTER XVII.

A DEADLY ATTACK.

BILLY STUBBS, by his experience as a police spy, had learned that when a criminal gets scared, he usually loses his head and does some act to draw down on him suspicion.

Reasoning from this knowledge, he could not doubt that Tom Colwood was the man who had cut the bridle; and it told him that Colwood had become frightened; and, that, discovering the boy to be a spy, he had made this dastardly attempt on the latter's life.

That Colwood knew him to be a spy added peril to Billy Stubbs's undertaking. So long as the boy could work in the dark, he felt safe. But, now, he would be compelled to cope with a man who was thoroughly aroused and who had shown himself to be a desperate and daring rascal.

But all this did not daunt Billy Stubbs, who had in his small body the stuff of which heroes are said to be made. It only convinced him of the necessity for greater caution, and nerved him anew for the task that had been assigned him by Chicago Charlie.

If Billy Stubbs had had a lingering doubt that Tom Colwood was the guilty party—the dastard who had cut the bridle—that doubt was destined to be dissipated that night.

Although Billy was pretty well worn out with the excitements and work of the day, he did not retire to his bunk at a very early hour. Few of the members of the Wild West Company ever did; for there was the performance of the evening to keep them alert and awake.

On this night there was the added excitement of the coming in of the cowboys who had taken part in the great race from Chardon. Three more of them came in, that afternoon and evening, to be greeted with enthusiasm and cheers; and Billy Stubbs would scarcely have been a boy if he had not hung about with the crowd of cowboys and lingered to listen to the talk and the comment on the race.

It was a hot Chicago night; and when at length Billy Stubbs retired to his bunk, pretty well worn out, he chose to lie on the floor.

It was the merest chance that directed him in this, but it was a chance that probably saved his life.

Tom Colwood, who had become thoroughly alarmed, had been closely watching the boy throughout the greater part of the day.

Colwood had professed to take great interest in the race and the racers, and had talked as volubly as any man on the grounds; but it had been all a profession. He had constantly kept an eye on Billy Stubbs, without appearing to do so.

Colwood had made up his mind that Billy Stubbs was altogether too shrewd and dangerous an enemy to be permitted to live; and he was only biding his time and waiting for a good opportunity to perform what he had hoped to accomplish that day—the bringing about of the death of the daring young police spy.

From a safe point of observation he had seen Buffalo Bill hurl the *riata* over the head of the cayuse; and he had afterward seen them examine the bridle; and had burned with a feverish and intense desire to know the purport of their conversation.

This he could not learn, of course; but the guess he made was a shrewd one, and not far from correct.

"Curse the young scamp!" he had grated. "He thinks he'll git the cinch on me. But he'll find that I'm a worse subject to tackle than that buckskin broncho. He's been set on my trail for a purpose, and I'll set him off!"

There was in his mutterings the essence of vindictiveness and murderous hate.

All through the early hours of the night he kept the boy under his gaze, and gave a sigh of relief when he saw Billy go to his bunk.

He did not immediately follow, for he knew that many of the cowboys were still awake. On the contrary, he waited outside, in the darkness, until sure these cowboys and Billy Stubbs were asleep.

Then he crept softly toward the cot whereon he supposed Billy to be lying.

There was a knife in his hand, which he kept close against his side, that the gleam of the knife might not by any chance attract attention.

The gloom in the room was so great that he stumbled once, and came near falling; but he righted himself, and, observing that no one had been aroused thereby, he clutched the knife with a firmer grip and stole on.

In pulling off the covers to make his bed on the floor, Billy had dragged those remaining into a heap; and this heap Tom Colwood mistook in the darkness for the sleeping form of the boy.

With such vindictive force it almost hissed through the air, the knife came down, plunging into and through the bed covering.

The sound awoke the boy on the floor. Looking up, he beheld a sight which caused him to shake and cry out in terror.

Colwood had discovered his error; and, now, seeing the boy, as the latter half-uplifted himself, he leaped across the bed and struck blindly at him.

"Curse you," he hissed, "take that!"

But, though terribly frightened, Billy Stubbs had not completely lost control of his senses.

As Colwood came down on that side of the bed, Billy grasped a shoe, which was lying near, and hurled it with all his might.

The shoe struck the hand of the would-be assassin, and tore the knife from his grasp.

At this Colwood became so infuriated that he threw aside all caution.

"You young hound, I'll do you up for that!" and he sprang like a tiger at Billy's throat.

Billy avoided the clutching fingers; and, seizing Colwood about the legs, held on for dear life, lifting his voice in a loud call for help.

Colwood struck him a furious blow with his fist; and Billy's hold relaxing, he sprang away.

He disappeared from the room almost as quickly; and, when the aroused cowboys tumbled out and began to ply Billy Stubbs with innumerable questions, Colwood was nowhere to be seen.

But the knife remained on the floor as an evidence of the attack.

Billy's story kindled their rage, and they made a search for Colwood throughout the grounds—many with the avowed intention of lynching him should he be found—but Tom Colwood had vanished.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN THE SECRET CAVERN.

TOM COLWOOD, when he bounded from the bunk-room, did not linger in the grounds of the Wild West. He felt that to do so would be suicidal, for he had had sufficient experience with cowboy character and cowboy temper to know that his life would be in peril after that attack.

Tom Colwood belonged to that despicable class, the ruffians of the border, who, calling themselves cowboys, have done what they could to give cowboys a bad name.

In the West, he had more than once been suspected of cattle-lifting and of other of fences even worse; and from more than one section he had been compelled to flee to save his worthless neck.

That he had succeeded in imposing himself on the managers of the Wild West Show, is not to be wondered at; for there are cowboys and cowboys, good, bad and indifferent.

He heard the clamor behind him, as the cowboys were aroused by the cries of Billy Stubbs; and he scudded away into the darkness, like a rabbit seeking shelter.

He did not tarry, even to obtain his clothing, but got out of the grounds as quickly as he could.

Once outside, he halted and stood for a few moments, attentively listening.

The exclamations and calls came to him plainly, and a shiver of dread swept over him.

"I reckon that was a fool break I made!" he inaudibly growled. "But that infernal boy made me so tarnal mad that I lost my head. If I could only have got that knife into him, I'd feel better satisfied. If he follows me any more, though, I'll do him up, yit!"

He lifted a fist and shook it angrily at the grounds from whence the sounds proceeded.

"When them fellers git me, I guess they'll know it! Likely Tom Colwood's made a fool of himself; but he's still got sense enough to keep out of their clutches."

The malignant expression on his face was concealed by the friendly darkness that hid his form.

He heard the cowboys, as they began their systematic search; heard the voices of Buffalo Bill, of Nate Salsbury, and of Major Burke; and then he turned sharply about and moved on into the gloom, still grumbling and muttering, and uttering threats and maledictions dire.

He directed his footsteps toward the high wall that inclosed the Exposition; and walked rapidly, but silently, until it was gained.

There he found a loose board, which he placed against the wall; and, by means of it, scrambled easily to the top. He then kicked away the board and dropped lightly into the Exposition grounds.

He found himself near a network of railway tracks, which converged into a station, where lights were shining and men moving about.

By making a circuit, he avoided these; then turned south and east, and came out near the big Agricultural Building. It was a long walk, for he was forced to double and twist many times on his path to avoid meeting some one; and his earnest desire was to keep from being seen and recognized.

Instead of turning north here, toward the Columbian Electrical Fountain, that wonderful piece of art created by the genius of the young American sculptor, Frederick MacMonnies—he walked along under the arches of the Intramural Railway (as the elevated electrical railway within the grounds is called)—keeping well within the shadows.

Then he struck eastward toward the lake, and finally reached the lake front near the Convent of La Rabida.

He again stopped here to rest and to survey the water, from which many lights were gleaming.

He disliked much to pass the lighted

spaces between this point and the long projecting wharf, toward which he was aiming, but these could not be avoided; and he skulked and dodged in a way to have created mistrust in the mind of any one who saw him.

But he reached the vicinity of the wharf, at last; and drew a sigh of relief, as he crept toward it.

"I don't know what Captain Clover will say to the work of this night!" he grumbled. "But, hang it all! what else is a feller to do? This is the only place in all Chicago that I'd feel safe in for a minute."

His anger had cooled somewhat, in that long walk, and he was beginning to view his deed in its true light. He had been a great fool to make that murderous assault on the newsboy. He felt it, now; and felt too, that henceforth he would be compelled to remain in hiding.

And that was an exceedingly disagreeable thought to Tom Colwood, who had spent so many years of his life on the free ranges of the great West.

"Might as well be in jail, and done with it!" he thought. "I don't see how I can stay in that hole down there; though I reckon I'll jist have to!"

Then he fell to cursing the newsboy, and Buffalo Bill, and his late comrades, railing indiscriminately against every one.

The boat, which had been used by the black to gain access to the tunnel, was no longer in position. In its place was a heavy piece of timber, which seemed to have floated there by chance. The timber had not so floated, however; and a close inspection might have revealed the fact that one end was secured by the mud of the shore, and the other end by a board and a few screws, which attached it to a piling.

Nevertheless, it seemed but a piece of drift, floating there on the water.

Tom Colwood showed his familiarity with the place by setting his feet firmly on this piece of timber, and by creeping carefully forward, steadying himself now and then by clutching a piling.

The timber brought him in front of the point where the door was set in the bank—but where no door could be seen;—and then he tapped lightly, as the black had done, and called in low tones:

"Blackhawk! Blackhawk! Blackhawk!"

A reply came back, as it had done on that other occasion; and shortly thereafter the invisible door swung inward; and Tom Colwood stepped from the timber into the water and entered the tunnel.

"Is Captain Clover in?" he asked.

"Been in this hour or more."

"And the boys?"

"Most of 'em are out, yit."

Tom Colwood would have preferred it thus, for he feared Captain Clover's anger; and, should there be an outburst on Clover's part, he did not desire that too many ears should hear it.

He felt much uneasiness, as he walked back along the narrow tunnel toward the cavern; and he endeavored to frame the sentences with which he meant to tell the story of his assault on Billy Stubbs.

But plausible sentences did not come easily.

Clover saw by his manner, as he entered the cavern, that something had gone wrong.

On occasion, Clover could be the jolliest of men. But there were other times when his voice held the snarl of a tiger. And the men whom he held in subservience to his wishes feared him at such times almost as much as they feared the police of the Western metropolis.

"I'm plum beat out!" Colwood confessed, sinking on a convenient stool. "I've gone and made a fool of myself, I reckon!"

This was an inauspicious beginning, and Clover frowned.

"What have you been up to, now, Colwood? I told you a dozen times you'd have to watch that quick temper, or you'd get into trouble!"

"Well, confound it! what was I to do? I discovered that there'd been a spy-a-hound in me over there at the Wild West, and I tried to give him my compliments. I reckon you'd have done the same! Seems to me I've heard you say as much!"

Clover's grim visage relaxed a little, and

he rubbed his bushy beard with an oily movement of his heavy hand.

"Well, I'll not say you've done wrong, till I hear what it is!"

Colwood endeavored to grin amiably.

"A miserable rat of a police spy has been shadderin' me, I don't know for how long. I dropped to the thing; and then I tried to drop him!"

With this, he plunged into a recital of the facts, coloring them to suit his own fancy, and tuing down his offense as much as he could.

"Well, you were a fool, Colwood; that's all I've got to say! You'll have the police on your track, and you'll have to lay mighty low or they'll nab you. And if they git hold of you, they might take a fancy to detain you on a worse charge."

Colwood was anticipating a lecture, and no doubt would have received it, had there not come an interruption.

A woman hurried into the cavern—a woman dressed in men's clothing. She was panting with excitement, and it was plain that she had been running.

Clover leaped up, with an oath on his lips.

"What in the devil's name?" he exclaimed, giving her an anxious glance.

The woman was under twenty-five years of age, and still retained traces of great youthful comeliness. Her face was dark, and her hair and eyes black. But her cheeks were pallid, now, and her eyes held a scared look.

"You've been running, Moll?" Clover questioned. "What's the meaning of it?"

"Cops!" she ejaculated, casting aside the hat that had rested on her head and had concealed her hair.

This, coming on top of the experiences of Colwood, was not calculated to soothe the captain's ire.

"Blast you for a fool, anyway, Moll Bundy! You'll be the ruin of us, yet. Here, Tom Colwood's made an idiot of himself, and you've followed in his footsteps. A curse on both of you! If this keeps up, we'll have to drop our plans and pull out of here. What got the cops after you?"

Before replying, she retreated behind a curtain; and when she came out she had discarded the man's clothing and appeared dressed in the garments of her sex.

"Well, if you must know!" and she shot the words at him with much viciousness. "I seen a purty watch in a shop winder, and I tried to lift it."

The captain uttered another oath.

"Well, they didn't git me," she averred, "and they ain't likely to! So jest shut your yawp, Captain Clover! When the cops come, will be time enough to growl."

"Where are they? How far did they follow you?"

She laughed, nervously.

"I suppose they're beatin' around outside, like a lot of hounds off the scent. They chased me into the grounds, and I thought they had me once; but I give them the slip a few hundred yards up the shore."

Clover paced uneasily back and forth the length of the cavern.

"What in thunder did you want of the watch, anyway? If you had to have one I could have bought it for you."

"What did you want diamonds for? I've as good a right to choose what I shall steal, as you have. I wanted it because it was purty; and—because—I—wanted—it!"

Clover gave her a look of rage; such a look as made Tom Colwood cower and shiver on his stool.

But he did not advance to strike her, as Colwood expected him to.

"It takes Moll Bundy to hold the captain level," was the cowboy's mental comment. "If I should stand up and sass him that way, he'd knock me flattern' a flounder."

It pleased Colwood, this exhibition.

"Do you think they saw you, as you ran to the wharf?" Clover demanded.

"I don't think they did, but of course I can't tell."

Clover was quite as much alarmed as he was angered.

He stopped his pacing to and fro, and disappeared hastily into the tunnel.

Having reached the lake entrance, he displaced the guard, and for a long time waited and listened.

He was not left long in doubt that Moll Bundy had been followed by the police to the very foot of the wharf. By close hearkening, he could catch the sound of low voices, and knew that the hated "cops" were puzzled and consulting.

Then he heard the dip of an oar;—but, as the boat was not forced under the wharf, his courage returned.

Captain Clover placed great reliance in the security of this hiding-place. It had been tested and not found wanting. He would have been a shrewd man indeed who had suspected its existence.

The voices died away, after a time; and, when they came no more, Clover went back to the cavern.

He was quieter than before; a thing that showed he felt the seriousness of the case.

"I thought once I might be forced to fire the mine!" he declared.

"The mine!" the woman gasped.

A smile that was more than half a scowl, swept across his face.

"You didn't know of the mine, eh? That shows that you don't yet know Captain Clover. I don't intend that the police shall ever take me alive; and to thwart them, as a last resort, I've got a lot of powder stored out there in the side of the tunnel, with a fuse ready to light. I'll blow them, and all of us, into Kingdom Come, before I'll ever let one of them get in here!"

There was a subdued earnestness in his words that frightened the woman, and it had a similar effect on Tom Colwood. It told them that Captain Clover would resort to desperate and reckless measures, should he ever think such necessary.

"I didn't know there was such a thing out there!" and Moll Bundy shuddered.

"Well, there is! And now that you know it's there, and know what I mean to do with it, maybe you'll try to get a little sense into your head."

"Why not leave here?" Moll urged.

"I suppose I've answered that a dozen times, already. I'm going to strike for higher stakes than diamonds, and this is the best place I know of from which to aim the blow."

"But I'm going to give the whole band a lecture, as soon as I can get them together. We'll have to get out of here, if you and Colwood, and the rest of them, continue to make fools of yourselves!"

His manner showed that he was still uneasy; and he went back to the entrance again, in a short time; and for an hour or more remained there.

But nothing further occurred that night to disturb the quiet and plans of Captain Clover.

CHAPTER XIX.

JACK RACKSTRAW AS A MALE FLIRT.

THE fun was fast and furious, at the Irish Village in Midway Plaisance. There were jig dances, of the real "ould sod" variety, by both male and female dancers; and there were Irish reels, and music galore.

The intention was to represent a country fair of the Donnybrook sort; but, though the music and the fun were there, there was a noticeable absence of blackthorn shillalahs and the broken heads which seem to be inseparable concomitants of every genuine county fair.

Probably there was no one in the Irish village who more thoroughly enjoyed the dancing and the rough play than did Jack Rackstraw. Rackstraw would have been happier, perhaps, if he had come there on any other mission bent. But he was resolved to drive dull care away and have a jolly time, if he could.

"Ay! that was the rub. If he could!"

But he had found it impossible to have a jolly, or even a pleasurable, time of late.

The conduct of Miss Lilly Lilac was the cause of Rackstraw's unhappy frame of mind. Miss Lilly persisted in "flirting" with Uncle Steve Mayfield, notwithstanding Jack's wishes to the contrary, and, now, as a counter-stroke, he had resolved to enter the field of flirtation, himself.

It was a bold and a dangerous thing for Jack Rackstraw to undertake. Jack Rackstraw was not a "ladies' man," though he was honest at heart, sturdy of purpose and

loyal to friends. Perhaps these good qualities seldom belong to "ladies' men!"

Stung into resentment by what he considered the wrongs done him by Lilly Lilac, Jack Rackstraw had scraped an acquaintance with one of the Irish jig dancers; and now, at the time of the opening chapter, he was ogling this dancer;—as he would have expressed it,—“for all he was worth.”

This was the only way Jack could think of to even scores with Miss Lilly.

“Plague take it!” he had growled, more than once. “If she don’t keer any more for me, I hain’t a-goin’ to keer any more for her! I’ll jist lay myself out to have a good time an’ let her go. If she thinks more o’ that old Dakoty clod hopper than she does of me, why, blame his ugly pacter! let her take him. I hain’t a-goin’ to cry about it!”

But always, when Jack Rackstraw had gone that far in the soliloquy, a dry lump had risen in his throat, and a suspicion of moisture had crept into his eyes.

Jack Rackstraw loved Lilly Lilac as he had never loved any other woman; and, though he disliked to confess it even to himself, her actions were crushing him.

Nor had he been able to find surcease for his grief at the Irish Village, in the smiles of the jig-dancer, or anywhere else, though he had sought it diligently.

The jig dancer whirled and pivoted with rare Irish grace, and cast on the honest tar many smiling glances, and these Rackstraw returned, and kept telling himself, the while, that he was having a rousing good time, and that Miss Lilly Lilac was not so essential to his happiness, after all.

The flute-player piped his mellowest notes and giddiest reels, and Rackstraw clasped his hands and cheered noisily and with much affected warmth.

But the music and the fun and the dancing ended at last; and, when Jack would have torn himself away with the crowd, the jig-dancer advanced and drew him into a corner.

There were many cozy corners in this village, where children played and old women sat at their knitting—many cozy corners for lovers’ talks—and it was into one of these that the girl drew him.

She was a pretty girl with a pink and white complexion, and the faintest suggestion of red in her hair.

Jack Rackstraw was wholly to blame for this advance on her part; for, in his desperation, and to “even scores” with Miss Lilly, he had whispered much foolish nonsense into her ear, and had tried, as well as he could in his clumsy way, to make her think he cared something for her.

In this Rackstraw deserved severe censure.

“Arrah, now! you wasn’t goin’ to leave me in that way? An’ after all the purty things ye’ve been a sayin’ to me?”

Rackstraw felt like a self-confessed criminal, but he rallied his fainting courage.

“I wasn’t tryin’ to run away!” he denied. “Why should I? There hain’t any other girl in this show that’s half so good-lookin’ as you are.”

“You’re a sw’ate flatterer, like all the American gintlemen! But ye didn’t bring me the bo’quet that ye promised me. Ye said ye’d bring me wan with red and white roses intil it, an’ not a bo’quet have I seen this day. Ochone! Ochone! Ye’re no more of a thruth-teller than the rist of them.”

“A plague on the posies! I fergot all about it, till this blessed minute!” Rackstraw apologized. “But with them cheeks o’ yourn, I don’t see what you can want with bo’quets. I’m ready to swear that they’re redder an’ han’somer than any that ever grew in a garden.”

“What if yer Chicago gyurl should hear ye spakin’ that way to me!” she demanded, with a roguish glance.

Jack started, as if he had stepped on a serpent.

“I hain’t got any!” he blustered.

“Now thin, I know ye’r a-lyin’ to me,” and she shook her forefinger warningly at him. “Ye towld me es much only yister-day.”

“I hain’t got any,” Jack repeated. “I’ve throwed her over;—or, rather, she’s throwed me over. We’re quits! We’re out! I’m

free to take myself to any market that I want to!”

He groaned inwardly, as he made these assertions.

The recollection of Lilly Lilac thus brought so strongly home to him, spoiled whatever of pleasure Rackstraw might have found in the company of the Irish girl.

“I’ll bring ye that bo’quet, to-morrow,” he promised. “I’ll put a thread around my finger, so’s I’ll not fergit it.”

She sought to detain him, but Rackstraw successfully resisted her, and soon after left the village.

“I’m the biggest fool on this hyer planet!” he declared, when he found himself again in the open air. “And if there was any patent kicking machine in these grounds, I’d hire it by the hour to git in its work on me. I think I could give it a continual job. Dod rot the Irish girl! and the Irish Village, and the jig-dancin’ an’ all that! A bo’quet! If somebody’d take Jack Rackstraw by the neck and throw him into the lake, and hold him there till he never come up again, they’d be a-doin’ a Christian duty.”

He told himself he had never felt quite so miserable and sneaking; and, foolish man that he was, he was inclined to charge the whole blame on Lilly Lilac.

So inconceivably strange is the human mind, and so deceptive and vain a thing is the human heart.

CHAPTER XX.

A VICIOUS ASSAULT.

NOTWITHSTANDING that Jack Rackstraw left the Irish Village with such haste, he idled in Midway Plaisance until the shadows of night came down. This was done on the chance of seeing Barton Brown; and, also, because the sailor had no place that he especially desired to visit. He did not want to go aboard the patrol boat, or the Andy Johnson; and a visit to the Mayfield residence, a thing that would have so delighted him in the old days, was not now to be thought of.

And so he wandered here and there, very much like a lost sheep, poking into the various exhibits and gardens, listening to the Babel of sounds and watching the sauntering people.

There was distraction in this, and distraction was what Jack Rackstraw sought.

It was after nightfall while he was still thus sauntering when a friendly hand, fell on his shoulder.

He turned about and saw Chicago Charlie before him.

“Not been to any body’s funeral, eh? You look it!”

“I feel most like I wisht I was goin’ to my own,” averred the sailor.

“Why, some one told me this afternoon that Jack Rackstraw was the jolliest dog in Midway! I’ve been hearing yarns about you, old man. If you don’t look out, Miss Lilly Lilac will cuff your ears!”

“Let up on that, will you?” Rackstraw snarled. “I ain’t nothin’ to Miss Lilly, and she ain’t nothin’ to me.”

“What?” stopping aghast.

“Needn’t look at me that way, Clingstone! I’m in dead earnest! I wish to goodness that this hyer case we’re workin’ on was sunk in the bottom o’ the lake!”

Chicago Charlie saw that something was wrong, and thrust a hand kindly through Rackstraw’s arm, as they walked on together.

“Tell me about it,” he adjured. “What’s the trouble? You can rely on me.”

“It all come o’ you orderin’ of Miss Lilly to go up to that house,” jerking a thumb in the direction of the city. “That was the beginnin’ of it; and the end—well, I reckon the end is that me and her are quits!”

“But you don’t explain,” said Clingstone.

“It’s that infernal clodhopper! Uncle Steve, he calls himself. He’s been a-shinin’ up to Miss Lilly.”

“But she wouldn’t have anything to do with him! He’s old enough—”

“Not a great sight older’n me! And she’s been a-shinin’ up to him! Oh, you needn’t look at me that way! I’ve got two eyes in my head, yit; and, when I see a thing, I see it! Them two’ve been a-lovin’ an’ a-dovin’ like all git out. Why, act’illy, I seen him try to kiss her hand!”

“And she permitted it?”

“Can’t say as to that, fer I didn’t stay to see. They were in the arbor, an’ I jist happened to come around the p’int o’ the house. I back-tracked without waitin’ for orders.”

“And what does Mrs. Lilly have to say about it?”

“That’s the wu’st of it! She don’t say anything. She jist laughs at me. But, when I accused her to her face, she wouldn’t deny it. She only laughed the louder. I tell you, Clingstone, I can’t stand it. You’re liable to hear o’ me doin’ something desperate. I don’t know but I’ve done it, already!”

The Columbian Detective was very much interested and very much puzzled. He had never doubted Lilly Lilac’s affection for Jack Rackstraw. Still, he could not deny that Lilly might have changed her mind, and taken a fancy to the farmer from the Dakota plains. It seemed unlikely, he thought, but it was possible.

“What do you mean by that?”

“Well, I’ve been and made a wholesale fool of myself, I allow! Yes, and hang it!”—with a sudden outburst of wrath—“I reckon I’ll go and make a fool of myself some more times before the week’s ended. There’s other girls in the world besides Lilly Lilac. I calculate I can let her know that, if I can’t do anything else.”

“I take it, you’ve been trying to let her know that, already?”

“Well, yes; I have,” Jackstraw confessed. “There’s a jig-dancer down here at the Irish Village that I’ve been a-shinin’ up to, as you may say, and—”

Jack Rackstraw did not get to finish the sentence, and his further communications on the subject were given a forced postponement.

The two had been walking together down Midway, toward the entrance which opened into the Exposition grounds, and they had reached the dark and ill-lighted portion of the street which runs under the railway. The space is extensive, and, in spite of the lamps, is one of the great gloom; and is very dark even in the hours of daylight.

Neither was anticipating danger.

Four or five blacks, who, in the uncertain light, seemed to be Zulus, leaped on the men, as they moved slowly along and bore them to the earth.

The assault came so suddenly and unexpectedly that no opportunity was given to beat a retreat. The only thing the imperiled men could do was to fight for their lives; and this they did most gallantly, though at a terrible disadvantage.

That Kimberley Ben was one of the assailants was quickly apparent, for a silken noose, like the one which had been used by Kimberley in the shadow of the Mosque, fell across Chicago Charlie’s shoulders.

But he swept it away as one might sweep away a cobweb, and then closed with Kimberley, who was leaping at him. The two went down in a confused heap; and one of the other blacks hurried to Kimberley’s assistance.

Jack Rackstraw was equally beset. But the sailor was a host in himself and at home in a rough-and-tumble tussle. Nevertheless, it would have gone hard with both of them, for the blacks were armed with knives, had not some Columbian guards, hearing the sounds of the combat, hurried to the gloomy spot.

Rackstraw had one of those blacks on the ground, and was viciously choking the fellow with one hand, while with the other hand he was essaying to ward off the blows of the other black, who was leaping about him in an infuriated and excited manner.

Chicago Charlie had succeeded in disarming one of the assailants, and had gripped the knife hand of the other, when the guards came hurrying up.

Hearing the patter of feet, and knowing assistance had come, he tried to hold the black; but the nimble fellow wrenched loose, and darted away.

The others followed close on his heels; except the one which Rackstraw was holding; and even he succeeded in wriggling out of the sailor’s hands before he could be secured by irons.

It was all over in less than five minutes; and there was little enough to assure the

Columbian guards that their services had been really needed.

But Chicago Charlie was well-known to one of them; otherwise they might not have been inclined to believe the singular story that they heard.

The cause of the attack was plain enough to the Columbian Detective, and had been since he had felt that silken noose on his shoulder. He knew well enough that the leader of the party was the same fellow he had had trouble with at the Mohammedan Mosque; and he knew, too, that this last assault had been precipitated and directly brought about by reason of the constancy with which he had been hanging on the trail of Kimberley Ben.

The whole thing had been aimed at him, and only indirectly at Rackstraw.

Was Kimberley Ben becoming as much frightened as Tom Colwood had shown himself to be?

CHAPTER XXI.

UNCLE STEVE AND THE "HOODOOS."

UNCLE STEVE MAYFIELD occupied a small bedchamber in the further outlying wing of the Mayfield residence. It was away from the noise and bustle of the street, and the Dakota farmer liked it, on that account. The windows opened on the garden, which, with the green of the trees and the grass, always presented a pretty sight, at that season.

"The smell of them there flowers always brings back to my mind the Dakoty peraries," was his frequent pleased averment, "an' I don't allow, Stella, that you could 'a' picked me out a bedroom that would 'a' suited me better. It don't seem so much like town, back there."

But this bedchamber had disadvantages, as well as advantages; and, one morning, when Uncle Steve awoke and lazily turned himself, a rattle, that sounded very much like the deadly "whir" of a rattlesnake sounded; and Uncle Stephen, at one bound, sprung from the bed into the middle of the room.

He gave a little howl of fright, as he did so.

The thing, that had so sounded like a "rattler" of the prairies, rolled to the floor, at the same instant, and Uncle Steve saw what it was.

A lot of queer-looking shells had been tied together in such a manner that they shivered and gave out that peculiar noise, at the lightest touch.

"Great horn spoons!" Uncle Steve ejaculated, giving a sort of surprise and alarm. "Better been a rattlesnake than that there thing!"

Yet the thing seemed very innocent-looking and incapable of doing harm.

The Dakota farmer glared about the room, as if he expected a whole den of rattlesnakes to spring at him; and his eyes bulged with terror; and his round, moon-shaped face took on a queer expression.

On the floor there were other rattles, similar in character, and one or two tiny gourds; also a turtle shell, not bigger than a man's thumb, the dry and rustling skin of a snake, and a number of frogs, in various stages of decay.

These presented a sight not calculated to bring ease of mind to any man; and it seemed to have a peculiarly startling effect on the farmer from Dakota.

Poking his clothing carefully into a corner, he followed the bundle with alacrity, and hastily dressed.

All the time his teeth were chattering, his eyes rolling, and the semicircle of grayish beard shaking under the influence of fear.

"I'll be blest, if I ain't been hoodooed!" was his exclamation, as his gaze roved over the mysterious articles on the floor. "I've seen the thing before, and I know what it is. I'll take the cholera, or the fever, or the yaller janders, or something, and die! That's what I will. I feel it in my bones. A cuss on Chicago! Confound the World's Fair; an' this hyer diamond business, an' all the rest of it! Why couldn't I have stayed on the peraries, whur I was safe?"

Then he raised his voice in a howl, which rung through the house like the yell of a scared hyena.

"If Chicago Charlie's up hyer, this morn-

in', as he said he was a-comin', I want him to jist take a look at them things! Snakes an' toads, an' turtles! Great governor!"

He shivered and drew back, as if afraid to venture from his corner.

As it chanced, Clingstone had come up to the house only a few minutes before; and he had come there for the purpose of having a few words with Lilly Lilac. He wanted to get her report concerning her discoveries, if she had made any; and he wanted to have a quiet talk with her about Jack Rackstraw.

But he had not commenced the conversation when that call from Uncle Steve rung through the house.

"Did you hear that?" he asked.

Lilly Lilac turned pale.

"I think that must have been Uncle Steve!" she said. "The sound came from the direction of his room, and no one else sleeps in that wing of the house."

The Columbian Detective had risen from his chair and was standing in an expectant attitude.

Again the call came, chilling and blood-curdling.

"Oh, there's something dreadful happening to Uncle Steve!" and Miss Lilly clasped her hands, anxiously.

"If you will lead the way!" Chicago Charlie requested.

At this, Lilly hurried into the wing of the house, and along the corridor leading toward the room occupied by Stephen Mayfield.

Another yell hastened their footsteps.

There were sounds from other parts of the house, showing that the servants and occupants were being aroused.

"Ow! ow!" came the voice. "I'm feelin' creepy, already! Take the pesky things away!"

If Chicago Charlie had not known that Stephen Mayfield was not given to bibulous habits he would have fancied these were the outbursts of a man suffering from delirium tremens. They had all the characteristics.

He reached the door, at a run, and endeavored to open it. But it was locked.

"What's the matter?" was his anxious inquiry. "I can't get in. You'll have to open the door."

"Ow! ow! Is that you, Mr. Clingstone?"

The voice was tremulous with terror.

"I'm afraid to move!" he screeched. "I've been hoodooed, that's what!"

"Open the door!" Chicago Charlie commanded, somewhat testily. "Is there any one in there with you?"

"No! No!"

"Then open the oor!"

Uncle Steve was beard to tip-toe softly and slowly across the room; after which a key turned in the lock and the door was drawn inward. The Dakotan's face held an ashy pallor, his fingers trembled, and his eyes had a staring look.

"I think it's a-comin'!" he chatted. "I'm a-goin' to have the fever, or somethin'!"

He drew up his shoulders, shudderingly. Chicago Charlie stepped past him, into the room; and Lilly Lilac peeped through the door, with much trembling.

"It's them things!" declared the farmer, pointing to the objects on the floor.

Chicago Charlie could not suppress a start of surprise. There was here nothing to cause him fear; but, to say the least, the exhibition was not of a quieting character.

"How did these things get here?" he demanded, stooping to examine them.

"Fer the love o' goodness, don't tech 'em!" Uncle Steve wailed. "Don't tech 'em, or ye'll git it! They're hoodoos, that's what they air! I've seen 'em before. Once when I was in the South, a good many years ago!"

Miss Lilly looked curiously at the articles on the floor, but she did not venture into the room. They inspired in her quite as much dread as a mouse might have done; and Lilly Lilac, in spite of her courage, could not bear the sight of a mouse.

Chicago Charlie was quick to make up his mind as to what it all meant. The attack of the Zulus, under the lead of Kimberley Ben—though he was not sure they were Zulus—was fresh in his mind; and he attributed this to the same source.

He reasoned that an effort was being made to work on the superstitious fears of the Dakota farmer, in the hope of inducing him to abandon the work he was engaged in.

He believed the attack on himself and

Jack Rackstraw, and the murderous assault on Billy Stubbs, had been made with the same intention.

Nevertheless, he did not immediately advance his opinion.

"Who do you think put these here?" and he turned to the shaking countryman.

The answer was what he had anticipated.

"I most know it was them infernal Zulus! There's a hoodoo among 'em, an' he's a-tryin' to work his spells on me. Seems like I kin feel myself gittin' sick, this blessed minute!"

Uncle Steve meant a voodoo, though he used the term "hoodoo," so common in the South.

That the powers of the voodooes, or witch doctors, are held in great dread by ignorant and superstitious negroes, Chicago Charlie had long known, though he had not expected to find this dread manifested by the man from Dakota.

"I used to live in the South," Uncle Steve shiveringly explained, "and so I know what them things air. I knowed a nigger down there, once, that was hoodooed in just that same way; and,—confound me!—the nigger died! Don't you reckon you could do somethin' er other? Er git a doctor, er—"

He was shuddering and moving about uneasily, his eyes fixed on the dread-inspiring things scattered over the floor.

"That's all nonsense, you know!" Chicago Charlie argued. "There's nothing in this hoodoo idea. You'll not get sick, nor you won't die, unless you let your fears run away with your common sense."

"I'll tell you what, though, Uncle Steve! you'd better secure those windows, in some manner. I think you're right, in saying that it was the Zulus did this. Probably they came to the window and threw them in. If they could do that, while you are asleep, they could do worse. They could enter the room!"

The servants of the house were grouping themselves in the corridor, and a few had pushed forward through curiosity, and were standing beside the door, with Miss Lilly Lilac.

Clingstone did not like this, and so requested Lilly to close the door; which she did, barring herself out, with the others.

"You'd better keep quiet about this," Chicago Charlie urged. "I'm sorry those servants have got wind of it, at all, though I don't know that any harm can come of it. With your permission, I'll just take charge of these things."

"Oh! don't! don't!" Uncle Steve gasped, in protest. "There's only one way to break the spell. The fellow that the thing is aimed at, has got to take them charms an' bury 'em in the light o' the moon where nobody can't find 'em; an' then he's got to say, three times, a-lookin' over his shoulder—"

"Oh! bother!" and Chicago Charlie swept the articles together and tossed them into his handkerchief. "That's the merest nonsense. I'll just take charge of these, Uncle Steve! And all I ask of you is to keep still. Don't speak of it to any one!"

Uncle Steve Mayfield apparently felt much better when the hoodooed monstrosities were out of his sight, though he had protested against the act. His shivering and quaking ceased, and his eyes lost something of their idiotic expression. He breathed easier, and in every way seemed a renewed man.

Nevertheless, he glanced now and then at the handkerchief, as if he half-feared the articles might come tumbling out on the floor.

Chicago Charlie took another knot in it, to reassure him, and then deposited handkerchief and contents in his hat.

"That will do for the beginning of a collection of curiosities," he averred, smiling at thought of the fright which Uncle Steve had experienced. "If I only had some of those assagais, now, which the Zulus hurled at me!"

He was thinking of Lilly Lilac, at the moment, and of what Rackstraw had told; and he was resolved, as the chance seemed favorable, to question Uncle Steve on the subject.

"And speaking of the Zulus, Uncle Steve. Have you anything new to report?"

"Not a blessed thing, as ye may say!" the countryman declared, still eying the handkerchief. "I've been pokin' and mosey-in' 'round, an' runnin' here an' runnin' there, till I've nearly wore my feet off up to my knees, and I hain't, to say, discovered a thing. I reckon I wasn't cut out fer the biz."

"Probably you've been accomplishing more than you think," was the detective's encouraging comment. "This would seem to indicate it. The Zulus and their friends are getting scared—that is, if the Zulus have had any hand in the thing at all, which I doubt. Anyway, the diamond thieves are getting scared; as a number of things that have already occurred seem to show."

"But I more particularly wanted to ask you about certain members of the Columbian Quartette!"

Uncle Steve started.

"Yourself and Jack Rackstraw."

"What about us?" the farmer demanded.

"Well, there ought to be the best of feeling existing between the members of the Quartette. You'll admit that. Rackstraw thinks you aren't treating him right."

A cunning smile crept into the eyes of Uncle Steve Mayfield, but he did not reply.

"Rackstraw tells me that you've been making love to Lilly Lilac—or have been trying to. Is that just the proper caper now, Uncle Steve? She's Rackstraw's promised wife, you know."

Uncle Steve grinned and pulled at his beard.

"But she ain't his wife. An' so long's she ain't his wife, I don't know but the field is open fer any other man to sail in'an' win, pervidin' he kin!"

"But, is it treating Rackstraw just right?"

"If Rackstraw can't hold a girl, when he gits her, that's his lookout. I calc'late she belongs to the man that can win her. I don't want to make no hard feelin's, Clingstone, but I'm a-goin' to take that there girl back to my Dakoty farm. I've a right to git her, if I kin; an' I'm a-goin' to try pesky hard."

Chicago Charlie saw that in this instance persuasions and arguments would be useless. Uncle Steve had much stubbornness in his composition.

Nevertheless, he uttered a vigorous protest.

"That's all right," and Uncle Steve winked solemnly, to evince his shrewdness, "but I'm a-goin' to git her, if I kin!"

CHAPTER XXII.

FOLLOWING CAPTAIN CLOVER.

THERE was not a busier man in the Columbian Exposition, during the next few days, than Chicago Charlie; and this was not only true of those days, but it was true of all days. Having undertaken to ferret out the diamond thieves and solve the mystery surrounding the death of Sidney Mayfield, he gave himself little enough rest, either by day or by night.

All the members of the Columbian Quartette made to him regular reports, and he directed their work and their movements; and this, in addition to the many tasks that he set for himself.

Nothing more had been heard of the Zulus, nor had there been any further attempts to "hoodoo" Uncle Steve Mayfield.

Seemingly, Uncle Steve had almost forgotten the circumstance, for he occupied the same little bedchamber, and came and went as before. He appeared to have taken up the work of running down the murderer of Sidney Mayfield with renewed zest, though he was compelled to confess constantly to Chicago Charlie that his effects met with scant success.

There was one thing, however, he would not do: He would not approach the Zulu Village.

In these days, Chicago Charlie spent much of his time on the patrol boat, or on the water, hoping vainly that he might catch sight of the man who had struck him that dastardly blow with a sandbag.

Something told him that if he could locate that man and successfully trail him, something important would come of it. He believed that, so far, he had not "spotted" the head of the diamond thieves.

He also passed many hours within, or in the vicinity of, the big building that held the diamond exhibit of David Davenish & Co. More diamonds had been brought on, to replace those that had been stolen, and extra precautions had been taken to protect these.

It seemed not unlikely that the thieves might contemplate another raid here; and, one night, when Chicago Charlie was moving about in the shadows, keenly on the alert, and observing every one that came and went, he beheld a man, whose actions aroused his distrust.

The man surveyed the Davenish diamond exhibit with a keen and inquiring glance, that took note of everything; then walked away.

He was a broad-shouldered, sturdy man, with a dark, bushy beard, and a certain clumsiness of gait. Chicago Charlie could not recollect that he had ever seen him before, yet there was something suggestive in the man's appearance.

The subtle instinct, which had so often guided the Columbian Detective, told Chicago Charlie that this was the man he ought to shadow;—that this was the head of the diamond thieves, whose trail he had so long sought.

The man was, indeed, Captain Clover.

It was not the first time that Captain Clover had visited the building containing the diamond exhibit, since the eventful night of the robbery.

When Clover moved away, Chicago Charlie followed him, but at so great a distance that Clover was not likely to detect the fact.

He moved in the direction of the lake front, and took no great care to hide his movements, so that Chicago Charlie had little difficulty in keeping him in sight.

It was plain that Clover did not dream he was being pursued.

His destination was the wharf, as soon became evident; but, when he drew near it, his careless manner was replaced by one of caution.

He stopped and surveyed the lake front, the buildings and the boats on the water, before advancing.

This cautious action caused the heart of the Columbian Detective to beat more quickly. It made him feel sure he was wasting his time in a foolish pursuit.

He had studied the man's walk and general appearance, until he was now certain he should know him again wherever he might chance to meet him.

After an inspection of the wharf surroundings, Clover made a slight *detour*, advanced to the wharf's shore end, and there disappeared.

For a moment, Chicago Charlie fancied he had stepped onto the wharf and was walking out toward the boat landing; but this idea was quickly dissipated. If the man had been walking in that direction he would have been visible from the point of view the detective occupied.

Captain Clover had disappeared as mysteriously as if he had been a shadow, or some fitting creature of the night. Nor could Chicago Charlie tell whither he had gone.

The lights gleamed in front of the Peristyle, and along the wharf, casting fanciful traceries, but they did not serve to reveal the whereabouts of him whom the detective had been following.

Convinced that here was something worth looking into, Chicago Charlie walked quietly toward the end of the wharf, and stood there for some time, searching with his eyes for some nook or cranny into which the man could have crawled.

There was none visible.

People were passing to and fro along the wharf, and in the grounds, but the detective knew that not among these was the man to be sought.

When he had satisfied himself that there was no place within range of his vision into which the man could have crept, Chicago Charlie descended to the water and began to poke about the side of the wharf. He observed the openings between the pilings, and finally discovered a place into which it seemed the man might have disappeared.

But when he sought to enter this place, he found his way barred by water.

There was a timber, on which he set his

feet, and by means of which he advanced a short distance, but the outlook was here so unpromising that he finally beat a retreat.

Yet, if he had but known it, his hand had been almost within reach of the secret door, and his feet had trodden the same timber over which Captain Clover had passed so short a time before.

Chicago Charlie was keen-eyed and wide-awake, but he was not sufficiently so to unlock the mystery of this hidden retreat.

It was a gloomy, unpleasant place, and he emerged from it with a sigh of relief.

But he was not satisfied with the result of that night's chase. It was not often that any one whom he was thus shadowing escaped him; and the consciousness that he had been tricked, nettled him.

He walked about the vicinity of the wharf for some time, peering here and there, and was on the point of abandoning the pursuit and confessing that he was baffled, when a sound reached him.

At the moment, he was standing near the edge of the water; and the sound that came to his ears resembled the word:

"Beagle! Beagle! Bea-eagle!" thrice repeated.

There was something strangely suggestive about this, and the detective strained his ears for its repetition.

But the words did not come again, nor could he determine from what point they had been borne.

There were still people passing and re-passing, but he was satisfied that none of them had thus spoken.

It was extremely baffling and exasperating.

He felt that he was on the verge of a solution of the mystery, but he was not able to advance further.

All he knew was that the man he had trailed from the big Exposition building had vanished at that point.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A LIVELY PURSUIT.

CHICAGO CHARLIE returned to the wharf the next morning, and resumed the search that had so markedly failed.

But he could do no more in the daylight than he had been able to accomplish by night. The wharf was there, the pilings, and the hole into which he had crept.

He entered the gloomy place again and scanned its interior.

There was nothing to be seen, except the waves idly lapping the shore, and the water-stained timbers. That on which he stood seemed but a piece of wreckage that had floated there by the merest chance. The hidden door cunningly held its secret; and Chicago Charlie departed, as he had come, with no additional information.

But his mind was made up to one thing. He would continue to watch the wharf and vicinity with lynx-eyed vigilance.

In accordance with this determination, Chicago Charlie visited the wharf at an early hour that night, in company with one of the crew of the patrol launch. He thought it wise to take a companion, as two pairs of eyes were likely to be better than one. The man was quick-witted and keen of vision, and altogether the sort of a comrade for an expedition of that kind.

Chicago Charlie stationed himself on one side of the shore end of the wharf, and the officer from the patrol launch on the other side; but each far enough removed from the wharf to escape chance observation by any one beneath or on it.

The work seemed likely to prove monotonous; and, as hour after hour passed without anything appearing to excite their suspicion, the task became irksome.

But, when a small boat containing two rowers appeared from some point within the shadow of the wharf, their interest revived.

Chicago Charlie saw it first, and noted the singular way in which it kept in the gloom, as if the rowers were anxious to avoid notice; and he quietly summoned his companion.

The lights played across the waves, revealing the boat now and then, and the two crouched on the shore for a time and closely watched it.

Then they saw it leave the wharf and pull out into the lake.

From the course taken, it was plain that

the boat would pass not far from the patrol launch.

When this became evident, the detective and his brother officer quietly entered their own boat, which had been hauled up not far away, and pulled in the same direction.

The boat they were pursuing disappeared behind the launch; but, when the officers had gained the latter and climbed on board, it was still to be seen, though faintly, heading up the lake.

So odd had been the actions of the rowers in the little boat that Chicago Charlie was convinced that something was wrong. He was almost sure that one of the men was he whom he had followed to the wharf on the previous night; and thinking thus, he was extremely anxious to lay hands on the fellow, and look him for once squarely in the face.

He communicated his opinions and desires to the captain of the launch, and a pursuit was commenced.

It had been a week of inactivity to the men on the launch; and the excitement of a prospective chase was eagerly welcomed. They felt that, whether or not anything came of it, they would have had their fun.

The rowers in the small boat soon became aware that they were being followed by the launch, as was shown by their actions. They bent more sturdily to their oars, and headed toward the shore. But they were now more than a half-mile out.

At this sign of fear, the excitement aboard the launch increased.

The launch was sent forward at full speed and every man stood ready.

More than once such a chase had been known to end in a desperate fight, and not a few of the crew drew out and fingered their revolvers with many manifestations of nervousness.

Although the electric launch plowed the water at a lively rate, it did not come up with the boat very speedily. The occupants of the little boat were skilled rowers, and they sent it over the waves in a manner to excite admiration.

To Chicago Charlie, there was a sense of elation in all this. He knew, now, that one of the men in the boat was the same individual who had so mysteriously disappeared in the neighborhood of the wharf.

The detective had failed to find this man's hiding-place, but he was more than convinced that a hiding-place existed there.

The screw revolved with lightning rapidity and the waves parted and hissed under the bow of the launch. It was getting fully under way, now, and it was coming up with the little boat, hand-over-hand. But the latter was constantly drawing near the shore, and the result of the chase still remained in doubt.

Then a point of fire cut the darkness, and a bullet from the little boat struck the launch with a suggestive "spat."

Captain Clover—for the leader of the diamond thieves was, in truth, one of the occupants of the boat—was showing his teeth in a dangerous way.

Another bullet struck the water just in front of the launch, not a second later.

The excitement aboard the launch became feverish; and the fire from the little boat was returned with a vim.

Although the launch was now proceeding at its best speed, it was soon apparent that there was little hope of overtaking the fugitives. They had rowed so rapidly that they were close in shore; and it was this nearness to the shore on which Captain Clover had relied when he fired that defiant shot.

He had not believed that the fire would be returned, owing to the proximity of the houses.

Indeed, no more shots came from the launch; but almost immediately a number of rockets shot skyward, summoning assistance.

"Let them shoot holes in the sky that way if they want to!" Clover growled, running the boat against the bank, and leaping out to steady it. "Help me haul her up, here; then we'll slide. If we don't get her again, we can steal another. Lively, now!"

Captain Clover had beheld several men running along the shore; and he felt, in consequence, that the moments were precious.

His companion instantly scrambled out, in obedience to the whispered command; and

the two darted away together, speedily disappearing in the gloom and that was the last Chicago Charlie and his friends saw of them that night.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ON A DANGEROUS MISSION.

MORE than ever convinced that the wharf and its vicinity were the points to be watched, Chicago Charlie went back there the next day, and again the next night.

He made another thorough search, and found a point from which the boat might have emerged; but there was no boat there, at the time, and no indications that one had been there. Still, this was only a negative sort of proof, and Chicago Charlie chose not to consider it.

Again, in his search, he came close to the secret door, but without discovering it.

He returned to the patrol launch a sorely puzzled man. He had never come on anything quite so baffling. Sure that there was some sort of hiding-place beneath the wharf, he yet had not been able to find a trace of it.

His spying at night was equally barren of result; and at a late hour, when he returned to the launch, it was with a feeling of discouragement.

But he had not been long aboard when he saw what looked to be the identical boat that the launch had chased on the preceding night.

There were two men in it, as before; but they were rowing toward the wharf, instead of from it.

Chicago Charlie called quietly to the officer who had accompanied him ashore and directed his attention to the boat.

"It's the same!" was the exclamation. "Had we better rouse up the crew and again give chase?"

The detective thought otherwise, so unsuccessful had been the previous pursuit.

No doubt the men in the little boat were closely watching the launch, but, owing to the semi-gloom, this could not be determined. However, the detective and the officer quietly lowered a boat, and rowed in the wake of the one suspected.

Not until later did they become aware that this was the very thing that Captain Clover and his companion desired.

Captain Clover was a wary dog, and quite as viciously-minded as any terrier that ever roved unmuzzled; and, knowing that he was constantly being spied on, he had planned to slay, if possible, the men who were thus disturbing his rest, and seeking so persistently to discover his place of hiding.

As he rowed slowly and almost silently, a sardonic smile lighted his face, when he beheld the boat from the launch drop into his wake.

"The trick's working!" he whispered; though the information was not necessary, for the other could see the boat quite as well. "The fools are coming on, thinking to learn something, this time. I don't suppose they are such idiots as to try to over-haul us?"

Barton Brown was his boat-mate on this occasion, and Barton Brown smiled as pleasantly as did the captain. Each knew, as well as if he had been told, that one of the pursuers was the Columbian Detective.

"If Kimberley only does his duty, we'll rake them in," and Brown indulged in a chuckling laugh. "Kimberley is such an inky black spot, that they'll never see him."

"They'll not see anything but us!" Clover returned. "They're watching this boat, I've no doubt, as if there wasn't anything else in earth or sky worth looking at. Very well, let them watch. That's just what I want them to do!"

The thoughts of Chicago Charlie were turned toward that night when he had been assaulted aboard the launch. The coming and going of that mysterious person had never ceased to puzzle him; and he wondered, now, if he had not stumbled on the key to the mystery.

It seemed not unlikely that the men in the receding boat would have found it an easy task to climb aboard the launch, in the hours of darkness. That done, the rest would have been easy. The boat could have been left swinging at the side of the launch, and the would-be assassin might have safely retreated in it.

It was an ingenious and, perhaps, a rea-

sonable explanation, but it was far from the correct one, as the Columbian Detective was destined to learn at no distant day.

Watching the boat of Captain Clover closely, they saw it round a schooner, and disappear in the schooner's shadow. It did not reappear, though the Columbian Detective and his companions rested on their oars for a time, waiting to see it emerge from the gloom.

When it did not, they pulled on, fearful lest it had given them the slip.

Captain Clover and Barton Brown beheld this movement from a point within the shadow of the schooner, and inaudibly chuckled.

"The scheme is working," Clover whispered again. "They're heading straight this way."

He glanced up toward the sky.

It was overcast, but he could discern the objects his eyes sought.

A big hoisting-crane had been set up on the schooner and the long arm of the crane stretched over the water at that point. A dark, ill-defined shape, which Clover knew to be Kimberley Ben, was dimly outlined on this arm of the crane; and, just beyond Kimberley, there was suspended a heavy beam of timber.

It had been drawn from the water shortly before nightfall, and rather recklessly allowed to depend there, by the schooner's crew.

Captain Clover had seen it, and had planned to take advantage of the circumstance.

There was no one aboard the schooner but a sleepy watchman; who was now reclining against a coil of rope at the further end of the vessel. The water-front was so well protected by the patrol launch and by special police that no extra vigilance was thought to be necessary.

Under the directions of Captain Clover, Kimberley Ben had arrayed himself in a suit of deepest black—to match his color and the hue of the night—and, like a cat, had crept aboard the schooner, and out on the arm of the crane; and there he now crouched, with a keen knife ready to hand, watching every movement on the lake about him.

To make sure that there would be no difficulty when the critical moment came, he had carefully sawn in two a number of strands of the cable that held aloft the timber.

Kimberley beheld the boat occupied by Clover and Brown, as it glided into the schooner's shadow, and he also saw the boat that was coming in pursuit.

His hands trembled a little, not from any feeling of compassion, but because he felt he was taking dangerous risks, and from natural excitement.

But there was no relenting in his cruel heart, as he clutched the knife with a firmer grasp.

All unaware of the deadly peril into which they were running, Chicago Charlie and his comrade rowed quietly forward, wondering what had become of the other boat.

That boat had simply pulled further back into the shadow; then rounded the schooner, and taken a position sufficiently removed from the crane.

Here Clover and Brown waited in breathless stillness.

Chicago Charlie's boat shot silently into the shadow cast by the schooner.

Then the knife of Kimberley Ben glittered over head, and the big timber plunged downward.

It struck the detective's boat, smashing it almost into kindling-wood, and carried boat and occupants beneath the waves.

Having accomplished his purpose, Kimberley Ben ran lightly to the schooner's deck, leaped across it, and swam over into the boat that Captain Clover had kept there in waiting.

Furious and yeasty waves were running, the result of the timber's fall.

"Now, break your backs, till we get out of this!" Clover whispered, pushing a pair of oars to the black. "Pull!"

The watchman on the schooner had been aroused by the timber's plunge, and was hurrying forward to see what had occurred.

He beheld the timber roll to the surface,

bringing with it bits of the broken boat; and then, further out, he saw what he took to be the heads of two men.

The men were apparently struggling to keep themselves afloat, and what seemed a moan or a cry came from one of them.

Chicago Charlie had had an oar crushed under his hands with such stunning force that his left arm hung almost useless. As for his companion, he had suffered severely. The heavy timber had struck him on the shoulder, cutting into the flesh, and snapping the bones of the right arm as if they were mere pipe-stems, and rendering him unconscious.

The Columbian Detective had succeeded in grasping the officer, with his well hand, and was now endeavoring to support him and keep their heads above the waves. But he had little enough strength for the task, and could not have held up very long.

Although the sailor on the schooner could not understand exactly what had occurred, he knew that assistance was needed by these struggling men and he did not hesitate in giving it.

He instantly let a boat drop into the water, and swung into it with surprising celerity. Then he pulled for the point where the heads had been seen.

"Ahoy there!" he cried, lifting his oars and looking about, when he thought the point had been gained.

The disturbed waves were lapping the schooner's sides, and the big timber was drifting lazily away. The gloom rendered objects difficult to discern, and the heads had disappeared.

They rose to the surface again, in another moment, and only a few yards distant.

Chicago Charlie was rapidly weakening, and the cry that welled to his lips was little more than a gurgle.

With a stroke of the oars, the sailor put the boat alongside the drowning men. He found, though, that he could not get them into the boat; and his cries rung out for assistance.

The sailor held the officer so that the latter's head was out of the water; and Chicago Charlie clung with his injured hand to the boat's sides, until help arrived.

It came from the patrol launch—a boat manned by four strong rowers, that shot like a thing of life over the curling waves.

It was a singular story Charlie had to tell, when he found himself safe on the launch and his injuries had been attended to; and a number of the launch's crew went back with the sailor to the schooner to make an investigation.

Skillful surgeons were brought from the Exposition grounds, to set and bandage the arm of the wounded officer, who was finally conveyed to the city.

When the boat's crew from the launch came back from the schooner, it brought a singular account.

The heavy cable of the schooner's crane had been severed with a knife!

That it had been cut maliciously there could scarcely be a doubt, in view of the disastrous results; and Chicago Charlie was thoroughly satisfied that the dastardly work had been done at the instigation of the men he had been following.

CHAPTER XXV.

MYSTERIOUS WARNINGS.

LILLY LILAC was destined to an experience quite as startling as Uncle Steve's, and it came to her in much the same manner.

There was no voodoo charms in her room; but, one morning, when she awoke, she found a letter pinned tightly to her pillow.

She was naturally very much startled, for she knew it had not been there at the hour of her retiring; and, as the door had been securely locked and she was a light sleeper, the manner in which it had got there was puzzling in the extreme.

But there it was, pinned to the pillow.

Miss Lilly's fears were not so great however, but that she reached out and took it.

Its contents were quite as startling:

Miss LILLY LILAC:—If you are wise, you will not stay in this house any longer. Your mission here is known, and it will not be

healthy for you to remain. If you care anything for your own safety, and for the safety of the boy, you will go away at once. Better heed this warning!

There was no signature; nothing to tell from whence the note had come; and the handwriting was unfamiliar.

Miss Lilly became visibly agitated, as she read it. Although a woman of courage, there was something about this mysterious warning that filled her with fear.

She looked about the room and glanced at the windows. There was nothing to indicate that any person had entered the room, except this very positive bit of evidence. The door was still securely locked.

Shakingly, she read the note over again, her eyes dilating and her breath coming in gasps.

Its contents struck her with terror. It seemed that her work there was ended. And her mission had been discovered, which was worse! She felt she could never more possess a sense of security, until this diamond case had been brought to an end.

She did not want to abandon her work at that point, at that time. She was coming to like it strangely, probably for the reason that she hoped and believed she was accomplishing something.

Her courage rose, as she thought of what an abandonment of the task meant.

Still, little shivers of dread distressed her, and there took hold of her an uncommon weakness.

"What shall I do?" she questioned, with whitening lips.

That reference to the Infant Wonder was quite as startling as anything contained in the note. Not for anything would she have placed the boy in jeopardy.

"What do you suppose they mean to do?" was her thought.

The threat was mysterious enough;—perhaps it was more terrible for that very mysteriousness!

No answer could come to her many questions; and, finally, she carefully folded the note and placed it in her bosom.

Then she unlocked the door, [and, with a white face, left the room.

An hour later, she said to Stella Mayfield:

"If you do not care, I believe I'll go down to the Exposition to-day. I'll try not to stay very long."

Something like a barrier had grown up between the two women in the past week. No words had been spoken, but women do not always need words when they desire to manifest a dislike. And Stella, in that wordless way, had begun to inform Lilly Lilac that her room was better than her company.

If Stella Mayfield noticed Miss Lilac's palor that morning, she made no comment.

She gave her consent willingly enough, as if half-anxious to get the girl out of her sight; and Lilly Lilac, after rapturously kissing the Infant Wonder and pressing him to her heart as if she would thereby shield him from all possible and impossible harm, left him in charge of one of the other servants, and hastened to the nearest Elevated Railroad.

On entering the grounds of the Exposition she gave no heed to the many wonders there visible, but took the cars of the Intramural, and got off at a point of the long wharf.

She knew that the patrol launch was usually lying out on the lake not far from the long wharf, and she hurried along the wharf at her best gait.

Fortunately the launch was lying against the wharf, at the time, and she thus had no difficulty in boarding it.

"Is Mr. Clingstone here?" she inquired of the first man she saw.

"He's below," was the answer. "Laid up for a day or two with a hurt arm."

That white look came again into the girl's face, chasing away the roses that the exercise had set there.

For a moment she hesitated.

"Would it be possible for me to see him?" was her anxious question.

"I will ask, miss."

He politely gave her a chair and turned to go.

"Tell him that Lilly Lilac wants to see him," was her injunction.

The man came back in a short time, and piloted her to the little room below, wherein

Chicago Charlie lay, stretched on a cot, and watched over by his faithful wife.

He was feeling his injuries more than he had anticipated. The effect of the blow had been not only to cripple the arm and hand, but to disorder the whole nervous system.

Yet he looked up with a smile, and lifted himself against a pillow, when Lilly Lilac was shown in.

The look on her face told him she had not come on an idle errand; although his first thought had been that she had heard of the disaster and visited him on that account. He saw that there was a stronger motive than a mere desire to manifest friendship.

He motioned her to a chair, and the man discreetly retired.

"Will you read that?" she asked, giving him the note, unfolded.

A strange look came into his eyes, as he complied.

When he was possessed of its contents, she told him how and when she had found it.

"What do you intend to do about it?"

"That's what I came to ask you, Mr. Clingstone. I'm sure, I don't know. I thought I ought to let you see the note at once, and so I came down here as quick as I could."

He thoughtfully looked over the note again.

"Probably you know what I desire you to do?"

She shook her head.

"I should like you to remain there, if you will. I think this is a bluff, such as was tried on Uncle Steve. I suppose Uncle Steve hasn't been seeing anything, lately? He had a bad case of tremens, that morning."

Lilly Lilac paid little enough heed to the closing sentences; her mind being engrossed with thoughts of the note and the possible consequences, if she remained at the house.

"That's what I want to do," she averred. "But I'm afraid to, Mr. Clingstone! and that's the truth!"

He smiled at her earnest face.

"I'm not so much afraid for myself," she went on, "as I am for the boy. What do you suppose the writer of that can mean by what he says about the boy?"

"If I only knew who the writer is, the answer would be easier. Of course, I have my opinion."

She looked at him in eager anticipation.

"I think it's the man that gave me this," and he nodded to his arm.

Lilly's own fears had made her selfish, and she had not inquired concerning his injuries; but now she turned her glance to the hurt arm, in a questioning manner; and Clingstone told her how the mishap had occurred.

"The fellow who gave me this bruised arm, is the fellow who sand-bagged me, that night. I'm pretty sure he's the leader of the gang of thieves we're after. He, or more probably one of his agents, put that note on your pillow. That agent might have been Stella Mayfield!"

It was a startling suggestion;—startling to Lilly Lilac who had not once thought of Stella, in that connection.

"It may be you are right," she said, thoughtfully. "But if Miss Mayfield wants me to leave the place, why don't she say so? I couldn't stay there, you know, without her permission!"

She had an air of perplexity.

"Possibly she doesn't want you to know or me to know—that she has any such desire. You can see how that might be. She had no explainable cause why she wants you to leave, and so takes this method."

Lilly Lilac, recalling the change that had come over Stella during the past week, was almost convinced that Chicago Charlie had hit on the correct reason.

"I don't know what to say about it," she confessed, "but if you think I'd better stay there, I will, for awhile, anyway. That note isn't in Stella's handwriting."

"I really think you better stay," the detective urged. "No harm has come to Uncle Steve, so far, from that queer threatening he received; and, we'll hoped that none will come to you."

"I will stay," she declared, conquering her fears.

Charlie Clingstone asked that the letter

be left in his hands; which was agreed to; and shortly after Lilly Lilac took her departure and thoughtfully returned home.

Throughout the remainder of the day she watched Stella Mayfield narrowly, but went about her duties without seeming to be paying the girl particular attention.

Before leaving the launch, Chicago Charlie had assured her that he would station officers near the house, to whom she could call whenever she deemed it necessary; and this furnished much comfort and assurance as the shades of night again descended, for she dreaded the coming of the night.

All evening she was nervous; and, when she retired to her room, she carefully locked and bolted the doors and secured the windows.

"If any one gets in here to-night, it will be some one with wings!" was her mental ejaculation.

Although inclined to smile at her fears, she was firmly resolved she would not close her eyes in sleep, that night.

Already the nervous strain was telling on her; and, when the wind jarred the shutters or a footfall on the street sounded louder than usual, she started.

After the Infant Wonder had wandered into slumber-land, she sat down at the table and attempted to read. But she could not fix her thoughts on the page, and finally put the book away and went to the window.

Here she sat for a long time, listening to the diminishing roar of traffic, and counting the hours, as they were tolled from a neighboring clock-tower.

Ten o'clock came. Eleven o'clock. Then, twelve o'clock.

In spite of her fears, she found herself becoming drowsy; and, without removing her clothing, she lay down across the bed, at the feet of the sleeping child.

She did not think she would fall asleep; but she did not recall hearing the clock strike one, and, when she again became conscious, the early sunlight was struggling into the room. She leaped up, with a start.

The doors and windows were closed, as she had last seen them; but there, on the pillow, as on that other morning, was pinned a note.

A sense of terror took possession of her.

Plainly, some one had been in the room. In spite of all her precautions; and that some one had come and gone as lightly as the passing wind.

Her hands shook, when she unpinned the note and took it from her pillow.

It was headed:

"SECOND WARNING!"

And above it was a rude pen and ink representation of a skull and cross-bones.

What was written was short and to the point:

"Miss LILAC:—This is the second warning. When we come again, it will be to strike. Take heed in time.

Lilly Lilac sunk down on her knees on the foot of the bed, in a very spasm of fear.

Unconscious of her agitation, the Infant Wonder slept on, his chubby face the picture of innocence.

The girl looked at him in mute inquiry.

"Oh, what shall I do!" she moaned.

"What shall I do!"

The skull and cross-bones were dreadfully suggestive; and the sight of them, perhaps, more unnerved her than the worded threat.

She thought of Chicago Charlie's supposition that this might be the work of Stella Mayfield, but she could not believe that Stella Mayfield was daring enough to attempt anything of the kind. Nor could she believe that Stella had the slyness and cunning necessary for the work.

A weight of foreboding oppressed her.

"I don't believe I *can* stay!" she murmured. "Something dreadful will come of it, if I do."

She looked at the sleeping child, with a love that was almost motherly.

"I'm afraid I shall just have to go away from here! How could any one have got in to this room, without waking me?"

She let the note lie on the bed while she tiptoed softly to the door and windows and carefully examined them.

Apparently the fastenings had not been touched, yet there was no other means by which any one could gain access to the room.

She knew that some one had come in, either by way of the door or one of the windows.

Her sense of helplessness and confusion was complete.

"I shall have to go away from here," she again declared. "Even if Mr. Clingstone doesn't want me to. I don't think I could stay another night in this room. Something dreadful will happen, if I remain. I feel sure of it."

CHAPTER XXVI.

A BLOW THAT IS FELT.

LILLY LILAC found it desirable to again visit the Exposition grounds, where she went aboard the patrol boat and had a long talk with Chicago Charlie.

Rackstraw was on the boat, but he angrily held aloof; though he touched his hat courteously, as she passed him.

Chicago Charlie read the second warning note with as much interest as he had read the first.

"I shall not insist," he said. "But it will please me very much if you will remain a few days longer. I confess it's really remarkable how he, or she, as the case may be, manages to get into that room."

"I'm sure it can't be Stella Mayfield," Lilly asserted. "Stella couldn't do that; and she wouldn't have the courage."

"It is some one who is an expert at lock-picking. That is evident. I think entrance was gained through the door. With grippers and properly-constructed keys the opening of the door would not be so very difficult."

"If you fear to remain in that room, ask Miss Mayfield to give you another; and we'll see if that makes a difference. I do hope you will consent to stay."

He looked at her anxiously.

He had regained strength sufficiently to sit in an easy chair, though his hurt arm was in a sling.

"I know I am asking a great deal of you!"

Lilly sat for a moment in agitated thought.

"I might have the courage, if I could get another room. But I just couldn't stay in that room another night. And no matter where I go, I'll not be able to sleep a wink this night."

She looked worn and nervous, and Chicago Charlie compassionated her. His intense desire to learn who had sent the warnings, however, made him seem harsh in his demands.

"I will see what Miss Mayfield says," was the most that Lilly would promise, as she departed. "Maybe I'll have the courage, and maybe I won't. You needn't be surprised, if you hear of me leaving the house to-day."

The detective smiled encouragingly at her.

Miss Lilly's half-formed resolve to remain in the house almost vanished as she pursued her way homeward. It would have entirely vanished, but for an act of Stella Mayfield.

Stella came down-stairs, when she saw that Lilly had returned, and for a time walked about in one of the lower rooms, as if hesitating to do something to which she had made up her mind.

Then she called to Lilly, and somewhat nervously informed her that her services would not be required longer than that week.

"I really haven't a great deal for you to do, now, Miss Lilac," she avowed, with an affected smile. "But I've given you this notice principally on account of the child. The Infant Wonder, I believe you call him. He's such a bother. Only a little while ago, I found him digging up one of my finest geraniums."

Lilly Lilac bridled, but she managed to keep her temper in check. She could brook no disparagement of the Infant Wonder; for, though Christopher Columbus Stubbs was not in the remotest degree related to her, either by blood or marriage, she held for him an almost motherly fondness.

Nevertheless, it must be confessed that the Infant Wonder was very trying on occasion, as all playful, romping children are apt to be.

If Miss Mayfield had but known it, she had taken the very course to cause Lilly Lilac to remain in the house, until the week was ended, at least.

Up to the moment of receiving that notice, Lilly had more than half-decided to abandon the Mayfield residence that day, and might have wholly decided to do so, but for Stella's interposition.

Now, she determined to remain.

"Could I have another room for the rest of the week?" she asked, looking closely at Stella. "I'm almost afraid to stay in that one any longer. I think some one comes there to the window, for the purpose of frightening me."

It seemed a matter of indifference to Stella Mayfield where Lilly Lilac slept; and there was consequently no trouble in securing another room.

"I'll stay a day or two, anyway," was Lilly's thought, as she went in search of Christopher Columbus Stubbs. "I don't believe that boy has been digging in her old geranium beds. I never knew him to do such a thing, and it ain't like him. That's just an excuse!"

Stella Mayfield's request that she should leave at the end of the week, coming so closely on the heels of those mysterious warnings, seemed to her a little remarkable, to say nothing more. It was apparently almost proof that the suspicions held by Chicago Charlie had foundation. That, in short, Stella Mayfield knew more than she ought to know about the diamond robbery and the death of her brother, Sidney.

Up to that time, Lilly Lilac had not permitted herself to harbor any such thoughts. She had steadfastly refused to believe that Stella Mayfield was a guilty woman. But, now, her opinions were on a pivot.

Having regained possession of the Infant Wonder, Lilly Lilac betook herself to the task of setting her new room in order and removing into it her personal belongings.

It resembled in many respects the room she had quitted, but the mere fact that it was not the same room proved a source of strength and comfort. For some reason, she felt safer there.

"I'll stay!" she muttered, over and over, as she busied herself.

And all through the day she kept saying to herself the same words, to strengthen her resolution.

It is probable that in no day since she had been in the Mayfield home had she accomplished so much work as on that one. Work of the severest kind she found necessary to keep her from dwelling too much on the one thought that absorbed her.

Yet, with the return of night, she almost wished she had gone away in the morning. It was too late, now.

She did not lie down that night, so great was her fear that sleep would overcome her.

But it would seem that her fears were groundless; for, when morning came, no one had ventured near the room.

She took courage, with the dawning of day, and caught an hour's nap; after which she felt much better. But her eyes were red and swollen and the evidences of her sleepless vigil were many.

Another night came and went; and, when it brought no disaster, nor indication that the room had been approached or entered, Lilly Lilac began to breathe easier; and to think that the threats meant no more than the voodoo scare.

She often smiled as she thought of Uncle Steve, and it would have been extremely difficult to say what her fancies were concerning him.

She appeared neither to encourage nor discourage his numerous attentions; and the only indication of the trend of her thoughts was the light laugh that sometimes rose to her lips when Uncle Steve's back was turned.

But the security into which she was being lulled led to consequences the most dreadful.

For, one morning, when Lilly Lilac awoke, she found one of those terrible notes pinned to her pillow!—and, worse than all, *the Infant Wonder was gone from her side!*

She screamed in dismay when she beheld his vacant pillow.

Indeed, so frantic were her walls and exclamations that the house was aroused and the inmates ran to her room with anxious questions.

With the others, came Stella Mayfield.

In spite of the wildness of her agitation,

Lilly was thoughtful enough to pluck the note from the pillow and conceal it in her bosom, before any one arrived.

"The boy is gone!" she moaned, sobbing and wringing her hands. "Will some of you please search the house and the grounds? Oh, I don't know what to do or think!"

The servants stared incredulously and crowded into her room.

"I'm afraid he has been stolen!"

"Stolen!" Miss Mayfield echoed. "Who'd want to steal him?"

Lilly Lilac gave her a sharp look.

But it was no time for curious glances or inward questionings. There was but one thought occupying her mind, and that was, that the Infant Wonder was gone.

She ran to the front door and looked wildly up and down the street.

A man, who seemed to have been carelessly walking along the street, touched his hat and came toward her.

He was one of the special spies, detailed by Chicago Charlie to watch the house, and remain within hearing to render such assistance as Lilly Lilac might need. He had heard her cries and the exclamations which had followed, and had quickened his steps; but had dropped into a careless saunter, when he saw the door swing inward on its hinges.

He instantly recognized her.

"Has something gone wrong?" was his anxious question. "Mr. Clingstone instructed me to remain near here and render you such aid as you might need. You are Miss Lilac?"

"The child is gone," she sobbed. "He was stolen last night!"

He was much startled by her words, for he had endeavored to keep a close watch on the house.

"With your permission, I'll go in and make an examination."

He put a whistle to his lips and blew shrilly on it; and then hurried past her into the house, Lilly Lilac following.

When the officer entered the room from which the Infant Wonder had been taken, he fancied he detected the faint odor of chloroform, and he called Miss Lilac's attention to it.

The servants were in a state of panic. That the house had been entered in that manner was most startling; and they, for the most part, deeply sympathized with Lilly Lilac, and would have rendered her assistance, had they been able.

The policeman's whistle brought up the other officers, and a thorough search of the house and grounds was now made. But nothing could be discovered.

And when this was made sure, a message was sent to the Columbian Detective.

In her great grief and excitement, Lilly Lilac had almost forgotten the note; but it recurred to her, and she retreated into her room, and, closing the door, there read it.

And this is what it contained:

"You have failed to heed our warnings. To show you that we mean just what we say, we have taken the boy. He will not be injured, so long as you and your friends do not force us to desperate measures. You will understand what we mean! Abandon the work that you are engaged in; and your associates must do the same. If you do not, and at once, the boy will never be seen again by any of you. Remember the fate of Charlie Ross! We are in deadly earnest; and you now have evidence that Captain Clover means just what he says. Take warning! Take warning! Take warning!"

The paper rattled in Lilly Lilac's trembling fingers, and the words of the note seemed to burn themselves into her brain.

Yet, the central thought in her mind was, that the Infant Wonder was gone.

The knowledge almost paralyzed her.

How eagerly she devoured the statement that the boy would not be injured, so long as the men who had taken him were not forced to desperate measures!

She resolved to quit at once, and forever, the work on which she had been engaged. All the diamonds in the world were not to be placed in the scale against the safety, and perhaps the life, of the Infant Wonder. And what if the mystery of Sidney Mayfield's

death were not cleared up? The world could jog along if it were never solved!

Yes, she would beg and pray her friends to abandon the work that had already brought such disaster.

Clutching the note feverishly, she arose and paced the floor, sobbing out her grief alone there in the seclusion of her room.

It was a terrible hour for Lilly Lilac!

CHAPTER XXVII.

RACKSTRAW WARMS TO THE WORK.

JACK RACKSTRAW came up to the house with Chicago Charlie, in spite of his hot jealousy. The information that the Infant Wonder had been kidnapped in that singular manner, strongly stirred him.

"I don't think there's anything that could 'a' teched me quite like that!" he avowed, as they got out of a car at the nearest corner and walked toward the house. "I don't know what Miss Lilly'll think about it—that is, about me comin' up here, sence she's throwed me over! But I'm goin' to look into this thing a little!"

His curses against the men who dared to commit such a crime, were loud and deep.

Although Chicago Charlie was still in a weakened condition—his injured arm had not yet recovered its strength—he forgot his weakness in the anxiety that now possessed him.

He felt that he was to blame for this occurrence—that it would never have happened had he consented to Miss Lilly's request, when she desired to leave the house.

He had not thought the diamond thieves would resort to such desperate means.

There was only one thing that in the least consoled him, and that was a consolation of a melancholy sort. The diamond thieves, by their work of that night, revealed their fears.

He dreaded to enter the house and to face Miss Lilly; and he showed this dread, as he halted, with Rackstraw, in the yard.

But Stella Mayfield came forward and bade them enter.

Both looked at her keenly, searching for evidences of guilt in her countenance.

It was noticeable that she was flurried; but no more so than the circumstances warranted. Not an inmate of the house but seemed to be in a distracted state of mind.

Stella Mayfield was apparently as much mystified as any; and repeatedly declared that she could not conceive how the child could have been stolen.

But she was prejudged by Jack Rackstraw. Rackstraw viewed her words and actions through distorted lenses; and nothing she could do or say but assisted in convincing him that she was guilty, in that she had full knowledge of the whole thing.

Jack Rackstraw's face was a study, as he stood there, watching the workings of the girl's features.

"You p'izen she-cat!" was his thought. "You're a-playin' it mighty fine, but you don't fool Jack Rackstraw. If it was jist the roper thing to do, I'd like to wring that purty neck o' yours, an' make you spit out the meanness that's in your head. What you don't kn' about this cussed bizness hain't worth knowin'. That's my idee."

Stella Mayfield was seemingly unconscious of the sailor's suspicious glances, and replied readily enough to his growling questions.

As excited and scared a man as could have been found, was Uncle Steve Mayfield, who had been among the first to be aroused by Lilly's cries, and who had ever since offered innumerable suggestions, the majority of which were extremely impracticable.

"It just knocks me!" was Uncle Steve's declaration, meeting the two men as they entered the corridor. "I don't think I ever had anything that flabbergasted me like this does, exceptin' of that hoodoo bizness."

Then he began to rail against cities in general, and Chicago in particular.

But the one who was most hurt and most crushed was naturally Lilly Lilac.

Had Billy Stubbs known what had befallen the Infant Wonder, he would, no doubt, have been equally crushed; for Billy Stubbs loved the Infant Wonder as if the latter were his own brother. He had adopted the child, whom he found straying in the streets, and had been the means of bringing

the Infant Wonder and Lilly Lilac together. But Billy Stubbs did not know, yet, of this new misfortune; else he would have been at the Mayfield house.

Jack Rackstraw put aside his feelings of jealousy and his angry thoughts against Steven Mayfield; and entered with his whole heart into the work of searching the premises.

But though the search was long-continued and most thorough, nothing whatever was revealed by it.

Lilly Lilac showed to Chicago Charlie and to Rackstraw the note she had found pinned to the pillow, and Chicago Charlie took possession of it.

The whole interview was indescribably painful; and even the Columbian Detective knew not which way to turn next.

"I'm not going to stay in this house a minute longer!" Lilly asserted.

Then she appealed to the detective to abandon the work in which he was engaged, and to which he had already given so much time and thought.

To this Chicago Charlie could not consent.

"We'll find and rescue the boy," he promised, again and again. "We'll make that our duty!"

And when it was seen that no further information was to be gained at the house, he and Rackstraw went away, planning how best to enter on this new task.

"That infernal Barton Brown is at the bottom of the whole thing!" Rackstraw asserted, with unusual warmth. "And that there Stella Mayfield—she's a regular pussy cat! She knows all about it! Barton Brown's her feller, and whatever Barton does she'd be willin' to swear was right."

Chicago Charlie was thinking much in the same strain; for he had all along believed that Stella Mayfield was capable of much wickedness.

He was thinking, too, of the name, "Captain Clover," which was in the note. That was the name Billy Stubbs had heard Kimberley Ben and Tom Colwood mention, in their talk in the Zulu village.

There was a possibility that this Captain Clover might be none other than Barton Brown; but Chicago Charlie believed it was the designation of the man whom he felt to be the head of the diamond thieves; of the man he had followed and so mysteriously lost in the neighborhood of the wharf; of the man who had sandbagged him; and of the man he had so recently pursued on the lake with such disastrous results.

"My work must be in the neighborhood of that wharf!" he said, speaking to Rackstraw, as they hurried onward. "I'm going to camp right there until I lay bare that mystery. There's a hiding-place there, and I know it. And I'm going to find it!"

"An' I'm a-goin' to foller that there Barton Brown, as if I was shore enough his shadder," Rackstraw stated, with much energy. "If he hain't the king-pin o' the whole lot, then I miss my guess. Confound it! If we only had the Infant Wonder back ag'in, I'd 'most be willin' to drop the hull bizness, as Miss Lilly wanted us to. That boy's worth all the di'munds ever dug out o' the ground!"

In accordance with this threat, Rackstraw became a veritable bloodhound on the trail of Barton Brown. He gave himself no rest, either by night or by day. With a resolution that was heroic, he strove to put from him all thoughts of the bitterness that had so poisoned his heart. He endeavored to think of Lilly Lilac as the woman he loved, and whom he would continue to love, even though she should never become his wife;—and of Uncle Steve as a miserable, intermeddling clod-hopper, whose shadow chance had thrown across the pathway of his hopes.

So tenaciously did Jack Rackstraw hound Barton Brown, that the latter was not long in being made aware of it.

Wherever Barton Brown went he was sure to see, sooner or later, the sailor, in the near vicinity.

It angered Barton, but he had not the courage to attack Rackstraw openly; though he resolved, more than once, that he would "do the sailor up" at the first good opportunity.

One dark night, when the work of shadowing was made extremely difficult by the gloom, Rackstraw kept so closely to Brown's

heels that he finally fairly stumbled over him.

Barton Brown turned on him with a snarl of rage.

"You miserable skulker, what are you following me for?" was his angry demand.

Jack Rackstraw was in no condition to bear insult. Fed by the fierce fires of a constantly growing hate, his temper was most treacherous. If Barton Brown had but known it, Jack Rackstraw had grown to be a very dangerous man, within the period of a few days.

"Snap at me like a mad dog, will ye?" Jack Rackstraw questioned. "Who's a miserable skulker? You'll be callin' me a thief, next, I reckon!"

"You're a low-down, dirty dog!" Barton asserted, wrathfully.

It was the last straw.

With an exclamation of rage, Rackstraw leaped upon him.

Though Barton Brown was of a sneaking and somewhat cowardly disposition, yet he would fight when driven into a corner; and now, as he saw the the sailor's hand reaching for his throat, he struck out with rare force and vindictiveness.

Barton's fist caught Rackstraw on the shoulder, and almost knocked him over; but the sailor steadied himself and returned such a stinging right-hander, that Barton Brown went down under it.

Then, with a vicious snarl, Rackstraw sprang on the already prostrate man; and, as he afterward said, "gave Brown such a mauling as he had never had in his life."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"THAT CURSED CLOD-HOPPER!"

THE encounter between Jack Rackstraw and Barton Brown took place not far from the Mayfield residence; and, when it was ended, and Rackstraw had satisfied his sanguinary impulses of the moment, he left Brown lying where he had hurled him, and walked on, in a savage mood, toward the house.

It would probably not have been safe for Uncle Stephen Mayfield to have encountered the sailor at that time. The blow which Brown had given him, and the fury of the fight, had put Rackstraw in an ugly temper.

"If that there scoundrel," referring to Brown, "ever shows his teeth at me ag'in, I'll jist naturally pulverize him. An', as fer Uncle Steve—"

He did not finish the sentence.

He had come in sight of the house, and stopped abruptly.

The blinds of the sitting-room were open, and he could readily see in.

Lilly Lilac and Uncle Steve were seated near the window.

The sight fanned anew the flame in Rackstraw's wrath.

"That cursed clod-chopper!" he growled. "How I'd like to serve him as I done Brown. He'd want to go back to Jintown, an' stay there!"

For a few moments he stood irresolutely, and once or twice seemed on the point of turning away.

Then he advanced, determined to hear, if he could, as well as see.

He felt it to be an unmanly resolve; but the sight of those two sitting so near to each other, momentarily unbalanced him.

"I'll wring the neck of that Dakoty farmer, yit!"

The jealousy he had tried to smother was blazing again.

He mounted the fence and carefully made his way into the yard; and then crept slyly up to the window.

"I'm a miserable sneak!" was his self-accusation. "I ought to be horse-whipped for this; but I'm hanged if I can help it. Maybe it ain't so bad as I think. Maybe Lilly don't keer so much fer him, after all. I'm jist bound to see!"

Thus muttering and thinking, he drew near the window.

Fortunately for his purpose, the sash was partly raised and he could overhear their low-toned conversation. But the position taken kept him from seeing them.

As will be observed, Lilly Lilac had not yet left the Mayfield residence. A streak of apparent kindness on the part of Stella May-

field—or, was it real kindness?—was the cause.

No one seemingly more sympathized with Miss Lilly in her affliction, than did Stella Mayfield, during the days immediately following the disappearance of the Infant Wonder.

And Lilly Lilac, rendered curious by this changed air, had not left the place, as she had meant to do; though she kept telling herself every day that the next day she would leave.

The week had not expired, though Stella had informed her that the notice was withdrawn and she might remain as long as she pleased.

Stella Mayfield had, in truth, grown very kind and considerate, a most singular thing in the eyes of Lilly Lilac.

"I rely on you, Uncle Steve, to find and return to the child," Jack Rackstraw heard Lilly Lilac say. "He *must* be returned to me! I tell you he must!"

"You could 'a' knocked me down with a feather, when I found out that the boy was gone," Uncle Steve declared, speaking with much solemn sympathy. "I don't know that I ever had anything that cut quite so close to my old heart-strings as that. Says I, to myse'f, says I, 'That'll jist be the killin' o' Mis Lilly!' an' it has been a wearin' on you terrible, as any one can see!"

"The sootherin' old liar. He's a-puttin' all hat on!" this from Jack Rackstraw. "I'd like to reach in through that window an' yank him out here into the yard an' eternally pound the head off'n him!"

"I s'pose you'd listen a little more willin'ly to me, if I *could* find that child?" was Uncle Steve's eager question. "You know what I've said to you, time an' ag'in, about that Dakoty bizness. You an' mean the Infant Wonder on that ranch up at Jintown, would be, as ye might say, happy as a nest er medder larks."

Rackstraw groaned inwardly.

"Oh, Uncle Steve! If you'll just bring me the boy, I'd be almost willing to promise anything. I can't hardly sleep of nights, for thinking of the danger he may be in. Who knows but those men may be starving him, or beating him? It's just dreadful! It gives me the shivers."

"There's no tellin' what I *might* do," Uncle Steve asserted; and it seemed to the watcher by the window that there was a swelling sound of importance in the words. "Uncle Steve kin do a good deal when he sets his head to it. I'll promise ye that I'll do the best I kin; an' if I should bring back the boy inside of a week, I'd expect you to tell me straight, without any shilly-shallyin', that you'd be willin' to become Mrs. Steven Mayfield. I think I c'd git the little chap by the use of money! There ain't nothin' like money to fetch sich villians to time."

"Oh, if you only can, Uncle Steve! If you only will! As I said, I'd be willing to do 'most anything. *Anything! Anything!*"

Jack Rackstraw could stand no more. His heart was on fire. He felt that if he remained there by the window much longer he should commit some act of indiscretion or desperation. How he cursed the clod-hopper from Dakota!

Then he turned and walked swiftly away, not daring to trust himself longer near the Mayfield house.

CHAPTER XXIX.

BEAUTY ON THE WAR-PATH.

OLD KING BULL, of the Laplanders, was on one of his periodical "jags," and, in consequence, that part of Midway Plaisance bordering on the confines of the Lapland habitations, was having a lively time. Whenever Old King Bull took it into his Lapland head to indulge freely in the "ardent," picturesque times usually followed.

In the sod house known as the "Lapland Palace," King Bull sat, endeavoring to recuperate a little by swallowing cup after cup of hot coffee, brought him by his numerous wives. The day was hot, as well as the coffee, and King Bull was not in the best of spirits.

The Lapland Village always attracted many visitors; and on this day, there came, among others, Jack Rackstraw, of the revenue cutter, Andy Johnson.

Rackstraw was as uneasy as a bear with its supply of provender cut off. He was in a most miserable frame of mind, and had been since the previous evening, when he had looked in at the window of the Mayfield residence and heard that bit of talk between Lilly Lilac and Uncle Stephen.

He had tried to continue the work to which he had so recently and energetically given himself, but he found it almost impossible. He had been up all of the preceding night, occupied in his duties, and because he found he could not sleep; and his face showed the effects. Also, it revealed the effect of the battle that had been raging so fiercely in his heart.

He found it as impossible to rest and sleep when day came, and he had been up and down Midway unnumbered times, poking into every place where a bit of excitement might be obtained;—and now he had walked into the palace of his Majesty, King Bull.

As it chanced, there were no other visitors present, at the time, and Rackstraw had the field to himself.

Old Bull greeted him with a frown, and glared at him through the round, disfiguring spectacles,—without which King Bull would not have been King Bull.

But one of King Bull's wives, seeing, as she thought, an opportunity to make a sale of Lapland trinkets, bestowed on the tar a greasy Lapland smile, and arose to make him welcome.

A Lapland young woman, not as fair a creature "as e'er the sun shone on," advanced, also, to the charge; and for a time Rackstraw found himself fairly besieged.

He bought a half-dozen things that he had no earthly use for, and smiled so engagingly on these female Laplanders that King Bull took offense and hurled a cup of steaming coffee at his head.

"Better be attacked by Zulus!" Jack laughingly averred, beating a retreat, and really glad to get out of the place.

But he had laid up for himself a store of wrath, as he was soon to find out; for, when his sauntering and idle footsteps took him finally to the Irish village, where dwelt the dancer, Meg Malone, her bright Irish eyes rested on the trinkets, and a flame of jealousy glowed in her Irish bosom.

"Why, confound it!" Jack growled, as she tried to snatch the things away. "Ain't I got a right to buy whate'er I please?"

"Not from women!" the jealous Irish girl declared. "Oh, Misther Jack Rackstraw, you've been a desavin' me; that's p'what you have! And, now, to insult me, you do be bringin' them things here!"

Jack Rackstraw was panic-stricken.

"I jist don't understand!" he avowed.

"You understand, very well, Misther Jack Rackstraw. Ye don't want to understand anny betther, that's the trouble wid you!"

"What in the dickens is the matter, now? What's the row?"

Jack, as has been said, was in no very good humor that day.

"You've been desavin' me. You've got another gyurl, up-town; that's p'what you have!"

"I hain't!" said Jack. "I told you that she'd throwed me over; an' she has. I never lied to you about that, Meg. 'Pon honor, I never!"

"I've been towld all about it!" Meg asserted, squeezing a tear into her eye. "I've been towld that you do be thinkin' the world an' all of that gyurl. Now, is it thue, Jack? Or have you been a-lyin' to me? Ochone! Ochone! If it do be thue!"

Jack was too honest at heart to deny the accusation.

"Well, confound it! Yes, it's true, that I think she's the best an' han'somest woman that walks on the ground! An' I don't think that I ever said she wasn't. But her an' me air nothing to each other—not no more; an' I've a right to drive my pigs to the best market I kin find."

The result was so unexpected that Jack Rackstraw was thoroughly beaten, before he knew how he had been routed.

The Irish girl, whose affections were not as severely lacerated as she had desired to pretend, flew at his head; and, grasping him by his abundant hair, pulled his head forward, and began beating it violently against the floor.

"Let up on that, will ye!" Rackstraw growled. "I tell ye, let up on that!"

"So you've been a-thinkin' that some one else was sw'ater an' n'ater than Meg Malone, have ye?" the girl screamed, holding him down by main force, and still thumping his head against the ground. "You've been sayin' swate things to other women, have ye? I'll l'arn ye that Meg Malone's not a cr'ature to be fooled wid. That's pwhat I will. Ye dirty scut! Ye dirty spalpeen! Take that! An' that!"

"Let up, woman! Fer the love o' heaven, let up!"

The chagrined and humbled sailor, tore himself loose and scrambled to his feet.

A great crowd of uproarious and laughing men had collected; and, under their yells, he wilted, and bolted incontinently from the place.

"I've always told myself I was a fool!" he groaned, as he staggered away, humiliated beyond measure. "Oh, fer a patent kickin' machine, that I could hire to kick me fer a week! If the fool-killer hain't a-huntin' fer me, it's because the fool-killer has gone out of business."

"If ever I tell a woman ag'in that she's good-lookin', I hope somebody'll be good enough to throw me into the lake!"

CHAPTER XXX.

THE PERSUASIVENESS OF A COWBOY'S PISTOL.

IN following the doings and experiences of the other characters represented in this story, Billy Stubbs has been too long neglected.

He could not be sure that Tom Colwood had permanently abandoned his position with the Wild West Organization, even though Colwood had made that cowardly attempt on his life. But when a day passed and Colwood did not return, Billy became almost convinced that the cowboy had gone for good.

He had a talk with Buffalo Bill, and learned that there were a few dollars due Colwood; but Buffalo Bill did not think it likely Colwood would venture back for so small a sum.

"I think, though, that your best chance of seeing him again will be right here. He has a few things that he will probably want to get. Then, I have found that it is almost impossible for a cowboy to stay away from a place like this, very many days at a time. The horses and the show, the riding and all that, appears to attract them, irresistibly."

When Billy Stubbs approached Chicago Charlie on the same subject, he found the detective entertained a similar opinion; and he accordingly retained his place and his cot in the Wild West.

He was still practicing the unruly cayuse; and once he had entered the arena in a great cowboy chase, in which he took much delight.

Only two or three nights had gone by, when he found that Buffalo Bill and Chicago Charlie were right in their surmises concerning the inability of Tom Colwood to remain away from the Wild West grounds.

But Colwood did not come back in just the manner anticipated. He came with the intention of injuring Billy Stubbs's good name, and driving him from the place.

There's nothing the average cowboy so despises as the petty thief and pickpocket; and on this knowledge Tom Colwood based his hopes.

Darkness and slumber held sway in the bunk room; and one of the tired Wild West rough riders, who had lain down without removing his clothes, feeling his pillow disturbed, stretched out a hand and found that the purse he had placed beneath the pillow was gone.

At the same moment, a light footfall sounded, and there was a rustle of bed-clothing in the direction of the cot occupied by Billy Stubbs.

He lay quite still for a time, listening for a repetition of the sound, a distrust of the boy growing in his mind.

Neither he nor any other of the cowboys had been made acquainted with Billy's antecedents and motives in coming there. They regarded Billy as only a boy whom Buffalo Bill had chanced to take a fancy to and had inducted into the show in a whim. Consequently, there was nothing to prevent this

cowboy from looking on Billy with considerable suspicion.

Grasping his revolver with one hand, he struck a match with the other, and held it above his head. The light revealed the cot whereon Billy slept, with the boy quietly reposing on it.

"Playin' 'possum, eh?" the cowboy thought. "Jist the same, I believe he's the chap that took my wallet!"

The light flickered out, bringing intensest gloom, and he lay again quite still, keenly listening.

When no further sounds came, he lifted a lantern from the side of his bed and quietly lighted it. Then he got up, holding the lantern in one hand and a revolver in the other, and stepped softly over to Billy's cot.

The boy lay as silently as before, with nothing to indicate that he had been awake since his head first pressed the pillow. But there was one suggestive indentation, at a point where the pillow touched the mattress beneath.

Into this the cowboy thrust his hand, and his fingers lighted on the missing wallet.

With an angry growl he swept the clothing off the boy, and gripped him by the shoulder.

"There ain't no use a-'possumin' youngster, fer I've got you dead to rights!" was his exclamation. "You might as well open your eyes and face the music."

Billy Stubbs leaped up, startledly, and rubbed his eyes, blinking like an owl under the light.

"That's very well done, but it won't go down. You took my wallet, a little while ago!"

A look of fear came into the eyes of the boy.

"I didn't!" he answered. "Quit shaking me that way! I didn't take anything!"

He wrenched himself loose and leaped to the other side of the cot; and, when the cowboy reached over to grasp and drag him back, he slid beneath it.

A howl of fright came instantly to his lips;—a howl that awoke the other occupants of the bunk room.

The real thief had been Tom Colwood; who had not been given time to get out of the room, warned as he had been by the cowboy's movements.

Colwood had crept beneath the bed, thinking that the safest place in which to conceal himself.

Now, when the boy came scrambling in beside him, he struck out savagely; and, when Billy terrifiedly gripped him by the knees, the two rolled over in a confused and struggling heap.

All chance that Tom Colwood could escape from the room passed away in that moment. A dozen cowboys surrounded the cot, which was dragged from its place, revealing Billy Stubbs and Colwood fighting on the floor.

They were separated without difficulty, for Colwood released his grip and cowered like a whipped cur.

"So you're the thief, eh! Instead of the boy?" was the cowboy's angry exclamation. "And you thought to lay it onto him! Boys, that's worse than stealin', any day!"

A chorus of denunciations told Tom Colwood that he had got himself into a ticklish place.

"I don't know what you're talkin' about, pard!" he whined. "I hain't done nothin'!"

But he was known to most of them, and several of them knew of the assault he had made on Billy; and rough hands reached out to drag him from the corner into which he had shrunk.

"Let me alone with him, boys," and the owner of the purse significantly shifted his revolver. "He's a-lyin'. I think I kin git the truth out of him."

He flashed the light in Colwood's face; and, at the same moment, pointed the big tube of the deadly weapon at the head of the shivering wretch.

"Now, you'll git down on yer knees, Tom Colwood, an' you'll tell how ye done that, and why ye done that! If you don't, ye'll have to take the consequences. You say you've been a cowboy, though I expect cattle-lifting was as near as you ever come to bein' a cowboy."

Colwood pleadingly put up his hands.

"Oh, don't! Don't!" he begged. "Take that down, please! Please take it down! I ain't done nothin'! I'll tell everything I know!"

The cowboys jeered at this show of weakness.

"Spit it out, then!" the cowboy commanded.

"What did you take that wallet fer? An' why did you hide it under the boy's piller? No monkeyin', Tom Colwood! I know you done it! An' you come durned near makin' me think that the boy was the thief. If you wanted to play sneak an' steal the wallet, why didn't you do it, an' slide? What did you want to ruin the boy that way fer?"

There were ominous growls from the crowding men; all of which made Colwood quake in his high-heeled boots.

Never before had the rascal been in so close a corner.

His face was as pale as was possible under the thick tan that covered it, and his hands, as he uplifted them, were trembling. He believed that these stern-faced men would not hesitate to kill him, and the belief took away all his courage.

"I'll tell everything, if you'll jist take that away!" he wailed.

"Spit it out, then! That's what I'm waitin' fer you to do. Spit it out! An' mind, Tom Colwood, that you string your yarn straight. It'll be the worse fer you, if you go to lyin'!"

Thus adjured and threatened, Colwood broke into a shuddering confession.

"I wanted to make you fellers think that the boy was a thief," he began, "an' I thought that the best way. I knowed you wouldn't let him stay hyer, if you once thought he was a thief, and that's what I done it fer!"

He dodged, as he said this, as if expecting a blow from one of the cowboys.

But they only looked on him with loathing.

"The boy insulted me, one day, and that's why I wanted to git even with him!"

"I done nothin' of the kind!" Billy Stubbs hotly averred.

Billy was wondering if it would be wise to acquaint the cowboys with his suspicions concerning Tom Colwood, and decided it would not.

"He insulted me!" Colwood repeated, paying no attention to the boy's denial. "That's why I attacked him that night, and—"

"Boys, shall I?"

The cowboy whose purse had been taken lifted his foot, meaningly.

Nods of assent came from the group.

At that, the heavy boot shot out; and, catching Tom Colwood in the rear, fairly lifted him from the ground.

Another and another kick, followed in quick succession, Tom Colwood howling in pain, and retreating toward the door.

"Git! you measly son of a skunk! Git! Git!"

Every word almost was emphasized with a kick, the cowboy's boot playing with Colwood's coat-tails in a way to make the dust fly.

"Ow! Ow!" the scoundrel yelled. "Oh, don't! Please don't! For goodness's sake, let up! Oh, please let up!"

But the cowboy's wrath was not appeased, until he had kicked Colwood from the room and from the grounds.

Such another castigation few men ever received.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE INFANT WONDER FINDS A CHAMPION.

THE kidnapping of the Infant Wonder very naturally turned all thought and all effort in the direction of his rescue.

Lilly Lilac and Billy Stubbs felt the blow more keenly than any others, but Chicago Charlie and Rackstraw were almost equally shocked and disturbed.

All were resolved to find and restore him to Lilly Lilac; but the trouble was to discover any tangible point to work to or from.

It was the belief—ay! the certain and positive conviction of every one—that the diamond thieves were the authors of the outrage. This had been made plain by the

warning letters received by Lilly. But the discovery of the whereabouts, or hiding-place, of the diamond thieves, had been the thing that had baffled Chicago Charlie's entire force since the very commencement.

If they could know where Captain Clover and his men kept themselves, they felt that the rest would have been easy enough, but lacking that knowledge, they worked in the dark, treading a weary round of toiling uncertainty.

Lilly Lilac had been almost frantic, since the disappearance of the boy, and Billy Stubbs had been well-nigh as inconsolable.

He had left the Wild West, to give his whole attention to the solution of this most pressing and vital question. Tom Colwood showed himself no more at the Wild West grounds, so that Billy's presence there seemed no longer essential, or desirable; and the boy was, therefore, free to devote his whole energies to the discovery and rescue of the Infant Wonder.

The work of spying on the Zulu colony had also been practically abandoned. For more than a week, Kimberley Ben had not been known to visit the Zulus.

In fact, every member of the party supposed to compose the band of desperate men who had stolen the diamonds and murdered Sidney Mayfield, had exhibited unusual wariness, since the disappearance of Christopher Columbus Stubbs from the Mayfield residence.

Chicago Charlie devoted his entire attention to the mystery that seemed to cling about the wharf, but his efforts were attended with very little success.

But Christopher Columbus Stubbs was not far distant from the puzzled detective; being, in truth, all the time within the cavern hidden beneath the soil that upheld the wonderful White City, in Jackson Park.

Captain Clover had been, himself, the man who had so skillfully entered the room occupied by the Infant Wonder and Lilly Lilac, and stolen the Infant Wonder therefrom. It was he, too, who had so stealthily entered Lilly's sleeping apartment and left those startling notes of warning.

Captain Clover had become unusually fearful, made so by the spying of Chicago Charlie about the point of the wharf.

It will be remembered how he sought the life of the keen-scented detective, and how near he came, more than once, to accomplishing his object.

The failure of his plans against the life of the Columbian Detective only made him the more nervous, and created within him a feeling of uncommon fear.

He saw that it must be but a short time before the detective succeeded in unearthing the band; and he knew that then the end would come. He was resolved not to abandon the cavern until he had carried out certain schemes that seemed promisingly in his clever brain; and it occurred to him that the writing of the threatening notes and the kidnapping of the boy would so frighten the force of Chicago Charlie that a temporary abandonment of the work Chicago Charlie was pushing with such vigor would be the direct result.

He told himself that if he could gain only another week, in which to strike the blow he contemplated, he would ask no more time; and the detective—all the detectives in the city!—would be welcome to search out his hiding-place, and lay it bare to a gaping and incredulous public, if they wanted to.

But the capture of the Infant Wonder did not bring the hoped-for result. The work of the Columbian Detective seemed to be prosecuted with even more vigor, if that were possible, than before.

And Captain Clover, knowing what was being done by Chicago Charlie, continued to grow in uneasiness and desperation.

He was in this frame of mind, and sat moody and revengeful in the cave under the White City, whither he had taken Christopher Columbus Stubbs, and where he had ever since held him.

He had issued stringent orders to every member of the band to use more than usual caution in all their movements, and he was angry, as he sat there, that these orders were not being more strictly obeyed.

Kimberley Ben and Barton Brown were both away. He had told Barton to remain

away, and to go about his business affairs, if he had any, in the customary manner, and to come no more to the tunnel, until he should receive orders to do so.

This Barton had already twice disregarded—calling down on his head the anathemas of Captain Clover;—and, now, Kimberley Ben was wandering somewhere out in the night, also in disobedience of the captain's instructions.

As for the captain, himself, it was absolutely necessary that he should pass and re-pass into the tunnel more than once each day and night, and he felt that the risk he ran in so doing was sufficient.

The Infant Wonder had already grown wan and thin. He had been a fat, chubby-cheeked boy when brought there. But the confinement, the fear of Captain Clover, and the punishments that were often inflicted on him, were telling sadly.

He had been so accustomed to the cheerful sunlight, that the semi-gloom of the cave held for him a world of horrors.

He cried very much, as was but natural; and, whenever he did, he drew down on his small head the maledictions, and often the blows, of the cruel captain; who feared that the cries might be heard, and direct attention to this place of retreat.

The Infant Wonder knew not where he was. He was too young to have much idea of direction and distance; but, had he been keen in that way, it would have availed him nothing; for he had been brought through the tunnel into the cavern blindfolded, and with a handkerchief in his mouth to keep him from crying out.

"I wish you'd stop the sniffling of that brat, Moll Bundy!" Clover commanded, shifting uneasily, under his uneasy thoughts. "He keeps it up half the time. If you can't stop it, I can!"

Moll Bundy had been given charge of the child; not because she was supposed to have a tender heart, but because she was a woman; and a woman is thought, rightly, to understand, better than a man, how to handle children.

Moll Bundy walked sulkily to the child, and somewhat harshly commanded.

"Now, you shut up! Do you hear? If you don't, I'll have to spank you."

Under this threat, the Infant Wonder became quieter, for a time.

Clover still shifted in his chair, put down first one foot and then the other, and toyed aimlessly with his beard.

"A thousand devils take that Columbian Detective!" was his thought. "I could murder him, free as air!"

That this was a truth, Captain Clover had more than once shown.

But murdering the Columbian Detective had been proven not an easy thing to do. The detective had the proverbial nine lives of the cat.

Chicago Charley had been seen in the vicinity of the wharf, not an hour before, which was the cause of this mental outbreak.

"I don't see how we're to work, or do anything, if he continues to hang round, in that way!" It just blocks everything! I'm afraid the scheme will fall through, and we'll be forced to cut out of here! If he'd only let up for a week—for five days!—it would be all I'd ask."

Again the child raised its voice to a wail;—a wail that was loud and piercing.

Angered by the outbreak, which Moll Bundy had seemed unable to prevent, Captain Clover sprang up and struck it to the earth with a blow of his heavy fist.

"You infernal little brat! That'll stop your mouth, I reckon! I'll kill you, next! Do you think I'm going to have you bring down the police on us in that way?"

He lifted a foot, as if he would kick the prostrate and senseless form.

The Infant Wonder lay pale and breathless, as if dead.

All the woman in the hardened heart of Moll Bundy was roused by the sight.

"Stop that, Captain Clover. Don't you dare do that! Don't you dare; or, by the God above, I'll kill you!"

There was something so fierce in her tones, that Clover stayed the uplifted foot, and looked at her.

Her eyes were like burning coals, and her hand was thrust into her bosom, where he knew she always carried a small pistol.

"I'll kill you, Captain Clover, if you do that again!" her voice icy in its deathly calm. "I'll kill you, if I hang for it the next minute!"

He had never seen her in that mood.

"What's the matter with you woman?"

"Yes, I am a woman, Captain Clover, if I have forgot all the decencies of my sex! And I'll spill my heart's blood to protect that child!"

He saw that she meant every word of it, and that her hand still held the concealed weapon.

He quailed before her.

"Tut! Tut! What's got into you? Do you think I'm going to have the kid howl that way and bring the police down on us? What's the matter with you?"

"Let 'em come, if they want to! I don't know as I care. But don't you lay the weight of your finger on that child again. If you do, I swear I'll murder you!"

The child stirred, and she glanced down at it.

He thought to take advantage of the movement, and leaped toward her.

But he was not quick enough. The right hand flew out, and there was a spout of flame from the pistol and a deafening report. But she had staggered back, at the moment of pulling the trigger, and the bullet did not touch Clover, but buried itself in the wall of the cave.

"Stand back!" she hissed. "Stand back! There are more balls where that came from, and you'll get the next one! Stand back, I say! If you dare to touch me or the boy, you'll take the consequences."

The boy was struggling out of the deathly state in which he had lain. Moll Bundy looked down at him again, then straight at Clover.

She resembled, in her attitude and in the flash of her eyes, an aroused tigress, standing above its young.

Clover was thoroughly frightened by the woman's recklessness.

"Good God, Moll! Haven't you any more sense than to fire a shot like that?"

He seemed more afraid that the shot would be heard, than of the bullets.

"Stand back!" she said, stooping and lifting the boy's head, and peering into his eyes. "You know me, now, Captain Clover, if you never did before. So stand back!"

Clover obeyed, in unfeigned fear; and the woman then lifted the boy and bore him to the opposite side of the cave.

There she sat down, pillowing his head, and smoothing back his damp hair, while with one hand she held the deadly revolver.

Her manner softened, as she looked into the white face, and saw the bruise on the side of the head, and tears came into her eyes.

"Poor little tot!" she murmured, kissing the face. "Poor little tot! Moll Bundy's about the worst woman in Chicago; but, still, she's a woman; and she'll not see you abused that way ag'in, while she has breath left in her body!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE THREATS OF AN ANGRY WOMAN.

CAPTAIN CLOVER stared at Moll Bundy, as if he could not credit the occurrence of the past few minutes.

Heretofore, the woman had been so servient and obedient. She had, in many ways, been the most valued member of the band. She was sly and cunning, and also wonderfully daring. Now and then, a bit of recklessness might have been attributed to her, but from this charge none of them were free.

He had fancied Moll Bundy loved him, and that, because of this love, she was leading her present life.

In this, Captain Clover thought correctly. Love of him had drawn Moll Bundy to the hide-out; but this love had more than once changed to deadly hate, as it appeared to have done in this instance.

From her position, she looked at him with eyes that were hot, as well as terrified. There was in the glance such utter scorn and contempt that it made Clover feel anything but at ease.

"There's no use for you to sit there and glare at me, as if I was a dog! We can't afford to carry things on this way. You know that, as well as I do, Moll!"

"I only know that you sha'n't touch the child ag'in!"

"May the devil take the child! If you want to coddle him, why do it! I was a fool for ever bringing him here. I thought I could accomplish something by it. If he was in the lake, it would suit me better!"

She drew the boy closer, and strove to hasten returning consciousness.

A hot tear splashed on his face, and he stirred, as if it evoked memories.

Captain Clover's keen glances caught the look—the softened look—that came into the woman's features.

"There's no use for us to row!" he declared. "We'll just make things worse. It will only spoil all my plans. I'm afraid, even now, that you've drawn attention to this place."

There was no reply; and, when he spoke again, Moll Bundy maintained her silence.

At this, he got up, and walked toward the tunnel entrance.

"I'll just see if any of those bloodhounds seem to have heard anything!"

He knew that only a few feet above his head were the streets of the White City; and there was a possibility that the report of the shot had been caught by some Columbian Guard or detective.

The time of the night was, however, favorable to him. The hour was late, and the probabilities were great that the streets were nearly deserted.

Yet, he was uneasy, as he walked slowly toward the tunnel's entrance; and, when he reached it, he asked the man there if he heard anything.

"Thought an earthquake had broken loose. Who was shootin' back there?"

Captain Clover swore a bitter oath.

"Moll Bundy fired her pistol accidentally. I was afraid it might have been heard outside. Haven't noticed anything suspicious?"

"Not a thing! I don't think it was heard beyond the wharf, and no one could 'a' told which way the sound came from. I was just jokin' about it soundin' so loud. It reached me, though, plain enough."

"Don't joke that way again, please!" was the curt command.

Clover stood beside the man for a little while, closely listening. No sound came but the low swash of the waves.

Finally satisfied that the shot had been heard by no enemy, Clover went back to the cavern.

Moll Bundy had restored the child to consciousness and was now talking soothingly to him.

The Infant Wonder drew back in fright, when he caught sight of the captain.

Moll Bundy gave the latter a sharp look.

"Just keep your temper, Moll! I'm not going to hurt him!" was the angry statement.

"Not but that he needs a thrashing, bad enough!"

"You'll not touch him again, Captain Clover!"

"I said I wasn't going to," with an uneasy laugh. "But I'll depend on you to keep him still. We can't have any more such outbreaks."

The child stared at him with dilated eyes, and remained quiet, through fear.

"I hope that you and he will both be sensible," Clover went on, "at least till I can work out my plans. We'll all get away from here soon, and then the child can be sent back to the people that think so much of him."

"Bah! They don't think half as much of him as they pretend. If they did, they'd try to get him back by abandoning their search."

"You know you didn't intend to return him, anyway, Cap Clover!" the woman grumbled.

Clover laughed again, in that uneasy way.

"Who said I didn't?"

"You said it, yourself!"

Clover had, indeed, not intended to return the Infant Wonder to Lilly Lilac, until the purpose for which he was working had been accomplished. He was reasonably sure that, should the kidnapping cause a cessation of the shadowing and spying, this would be renewed, when the Infant Wonder was felt by Chicago Charlie and his friends to be again safe. Therefore, he had meant to hold the boy, thinking thus to keep a club poised above the detective's head.

"Don't show your temper again, Moll," he urged. "Surely, my interest is your interest. As I said, we'll get out of here soon, send the boy back, and then go away together, rich!"

"We're rich enough, now!"

"Not to satisfy the ambitions of yours truly. Those diamonds will pan out pretty well, though I haven't sold them yet. I've been afraid to offer them."

"But I'm going to strike for money, next, and for a ransom!"

"A ransom!" she gasped, exhibiting for the first time an interest in what he was saying.

"Yes, a ransom, and a big one. You know that I've begun the forked tunnels? One of them will end under the room occupied by Davis, the Director General of the Fair. The other will end under one of the World's Fair banks."

He paused to note the effect of this disclosure.

"Well?" she asked impatiently.

"You don't see the point! I'm planning to capture Davis and hold him, either here or elsewhere, until the management comes down with a mighty big wad of money. It can be done, slick as grease. He is in his room, sometimes, very late of an evening, and, as often as not, alone."

"And the same night that we do that, we'll tap the vault of that bank and see what's inside of it."

His plans were of so daring a character that Moll Bundy could only stare in amazement.

"You don't think I mean it?"

"I don't think you're fool enough to try so risky a game!"

A bitter sneer showed in his face.

"You said something awhile ago to the effect that you guessed I didn't know you yet. I guess you don't know me! It isn't half as risky as it looks. I've figured out just how and when to strike; and I've got the directions for the tunnels and the exact measurement of the distance that we'll have to dig."

"It's always been my ambition to go a little ahead of anything that any one else has ever done. If we can lift fifty thousand—and it's likely to be double that—and rake in as much more in ransom money, I think we'll be rich enough to retire!"

"What good will money do such a creature as me?" she demanded.

And when he looked closely at her, he saw she was crying.

Tears had long been strangers to the cheeks of Moll Bundy, and Captain Clover showed his surprise.

"What in thunder's got into you to-night, anyway?" he asked, perplexed. "First, you fly at me on account of the boy; and now you're blubbering! What are you crying about?"

"If I'd cried a little sooner, there might have been more go d in it!" and there was in her voice a choking as of sobs. "If I'd cried before I ever met you!"

The touch of the boy's clinging fingers had broken down the wall she had built about her heart; and, for the time, Moll Bundy was again a woman with a woman's tenderness. She saw what a miserable, stained thing her life had been! How she had thrown away all that can make life of any value to a woman! And what had she in return?

"Money!" she said. "Diamonds? What can they do for me, Captain Clover! All the money in the world can't make me what I once was. I'm a miserable outcast, and I never can be anything else. What do I care for life? It would have been better for me if I hadn't ever been born!"

She drew the child again to her heart, as if to warm the heart into new and healthy life by the pressure.

"I don't care whether I live or die! And as for your money, I don't care anything for it. You can stick it and the diamonds into the stove. I wouldn't lift my fingers to pull them out!"

"But there's one thing! You sha'n't never touch this boy ag'in, while I'm here to protect him. Remember that, Captain Clover, and remember it well. You spoke the other night of firing the mine in the tunnel, if you could blow up the cops by doin' it."

"I'm just as reckless, to-night, as ever you was. I'm not afraid to fire a pistol, an' I'm not afraid to call out. What can the cops and the law do to a ruined woman like me? I'm ruined, already; and nothing they can do can hurt me."

"So have a care. You talk of your plans! Have a care! You have been trying me purty severely, lately, anyhow!"

He stared and plucked at his beard.

"If you crowd me, or threaten me, or beat the boy ag'in, I'll tell to the world all I know; and there'll be somebody else, and somebody else's plans, ruined!"

He had thought to turn her mind into a different channel, but it was impossible. He also manifested an unwonted fear.

"Have your way, Moll!" he consented. "You always would do that, and I guess it's too late to try to stop you! Have your way, and make a fool of the brat, if you want to. I don't care!"

Then he took out a pipe, filled and lighted it, and began to smoke in silence.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE TOLLERS OF THE TUNNEL.

A FEW minutes later, Barton Brown and Kimberley Ben came in.

"Had to do a thundering lot of dodging and skulking to get in to-night, at all!" Barton declared, wiping his face.

"Why did you come in, then?" Clover growled.

Notwithstanding this surly greeting, he removed the pipe from his mouth; and, rising, led the way into the tunnel that led from the cavern further under the streets of the White City.

Kimberley took up and lighted a miner's lantern, and followed Clover and Barton Brown.

Back in the tunnel, which pronged at this point, were several picks and shovels and some baskets for carrying earth.

There had been work done there recently. The

pronged tunnel seemed, in fact, to have been pushed lately with much vigor.

Some timbers, which had been brought from the tunnel that reached to the wharf, were in there, and also some that had been brought across a point of the lake in a boat.

"We'll not be able to dump any more of the dirt into the lake!" said Clover, picking up one of the shovels, preparatory to re-commencing work. "Those cursed spies are watching too closely. I suppose you didn't see any, as you came in?"

"Saw too many of them," averred Barton. "There were two just at the wharf's end, and it took a deal of keen work to slip past them. But we made it. Where are you going to put the dirt?"

"In the cave and in the tunnel beyond. We can half fill the cave, should it be necessary."

In excavating the outer tunnel and the cavern, the earth removed had been dumped into the lake, which had been easy enough accomplished then, when no keen-scented spies had been hovering about. Now, this could not be done.

"It won't make much difference, if we do spoil the cave as a living place," said Clover. "We're going to get out of here, boys, very soon."

"How soon?" asked Kimberley, also picking up a shovel and setting the lantern against the wall so that its light would shine where most needed.

"By Friday night!"

"An unlucky night!" said Barton.

"Hangman's night!" asserted Kimberley, shrugging his shoulders.

"I hope you're not such idiots as to take stock in that nonsense! The best piece of work I ever done was on a Friday night. And, if I'm not mistaken, this will be just as good!"

He sunk the shovel into the soft earth, and then tossed the contents into one of the baskets.

The others imitated his example, and the work of digging the tunnels was pushed for many minutes in silence.

"What's come over Moll Bundy?" Clover demanded, resting and mopping his face. "She's as fiery to-night as can be. Shot at me, just because I tried to stop the brat from yelling!"

The others dropped their tools in amazement.

That Moll Bundy, who had always been as wax in the hands of Clover, should dare such a thing, was most startling.

"She's got something into her head. I don't know just what! But, if she flares up ag'in, I'll see if there isn't a way to bring her to her senses!"

He struck the shovel savagely into the dirt, and again worked on silently.

A little later, Tom Colwood entered the cavern, accompanied by the guard, who had been stationed at the hidden door.

Both took up shovels and proceeded to the work in the tunnel.

"All here, eh?" Clover questioned. "We've got a big job ahead of us, and we've got to push it for all it's worth. Two of you go into the other tunnel and work there. Dump the dirt in the cavern in the outer tunnel. Just so you get it out of the way. I want to have this finished and everything ready for business by Friday night."

Colwood and Kimberly Ben went into the other tunnel, accompanied by the guard.

Apparently, all were now in the tunnels, that were expected to come that night. This was shown by the removal of the guard. Always, when any members of the band were outside, he was kept at the entrance by the lake to await their coming.

Clover was in a morose and moody state, in spite of the satisfactory progress that was being made. He could not rid himself of the disagreeable recollection of the quarrel he had with Moll Bundy.

"Confound the woman!" was his thought. "Whatever's got to be the matter with her? I never knew her to flare up in that way. And what did she mean by that singular threat? What does she know? I'd give a share of my diamonds to know just what's in her head, to-night!"

Twice he stole to the cavern entrance and looked out on the woman and the boy. The boy had fallen asleep, cradled in Moll's arms.

She was holding him in a close embrace, with her back pressed against the wall; and, to all appearances, was also asleep.

But Clover, watching her thus, saw her move her head, and knew she was merely resting, not sleeping.

"I could kill that boy, free as eat!" he grated, with harsh bitterness. "He's put the devil into the woman. And, yet, that outbreak wasn't wholly about the boy. Surely, it couldn't have been. And, yet, I never knew Moll Bundy to have such a spell of tenderness. A woman's a singular thing, anyway you take 'em. They'll be all smiles and sunshine, one minute, and regular hissing snakes the next!"

"Children and women are about the most unreasonable things in the world. I'd be better off with both of them out of here. I reckon I'll have to give Moll the shake. She's getting ugly and dangerous!"

She stirred uneasily, as if his troubled

thoughts had reached her; and he crept back to the work in the tunnel.

But his thoughts were drawn constantly to the woman and the boy in the cavern, and he found it impossible to resist the temptation to look in on them now and then.

Always he saw the same sight. Moll Bundy leaning against the wall, holding the boy; though, when he looked last, he believed that the woman was asleep also.

He shook his fist at her, out of the gloom.

"Yes, we part company, after this round, Moll Bundy. I'm not going to have any such fool breaks as that happen again. I'll get that pistol away from you, first thing. It was only a chance that you didn't kill me. You meant it all right, and only your awkwardness balked you. Yes, I guess you and I will have to part company. We've been long together, but all things must end, sooner or later. I reckon we've reached the end!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

HIGH-PRICED AFFECTIONS.

"I jist come to tell you that I've been foolish in all the time, an' not really a-meanin' of anything at all!"

Jack Rackstraw trembled a little and looked sheepish.

The Irish girl confronted him, with a queer glance.

"What are you m'arin' by that, Mither Rackstraw?" she demanded.

She trembled quite as much as did the honest sailor, though for a different reason.

"Well, after that last break o' yours, I shouldn't think you'd expect me to keer about comin' here any more," Jack argued. "A woman that grabs a feller by the hair and jams his head into the floor in that there way, hain't jist my style of a woman. An' that's what you done, Meg Malone; an' there ain't no use denyin' it."

"Who's denyin' it? Not I, fer wan. You made me that mad, whin ye kem here before, that I cl'ane lost my head; an' that's a fact. But ye'll not remimber it ag'in' me?"

Jack trembled more than ever, under this bit of pleading.

"I can't see that there's any use o' goin' any fuder. You don't keer a button fer me, an' they ain't any use pertendin' that you do; an' as fer me, well, as I said, I've jist been a-foolishin'!"

The girl was becoming angry; and, seeing this, his distress grew.

"I hope that you won't think hard o' me, Meg!" he pleaded. "You kin never make me believe that you ever keered the rap o' your finger fer me! I jist know that you didn't!"

"And you kin stand there and tell me that, Jack Rackstraw!" she cried, her face purpling.

But in truth, pretty Meg Malone had never cared especially for Jack Rackstraw. She had merely amused herself with him, having many such admirers in the White City! But it cut her to the quick to know that Jack, also, had been only seeking amusement. It was an offense, that, in another, she could not condone.

"If I was half-way a-lyin' before, I can't see that there's any use in me a-continuin' it," Jack urged. "We've had our little fun; an' now we can go our ways, and fergit all about it. You'll witness that I never said a harmful word to ye; ner done anything, exceptin' to brag on yer cheeks and yer eyes; which air purty, as I am still here to say."

"Will you stop insultin' me?"

Jack gasped and retreated.

"There never was honestest words said!" Jack avowed. "Still, I'll take 'em back, if you say so. I'll say that you're cross-eyed and red-headed, if you want me to," and he tried to grin.

It was the last straw.

Her wrath boiled over; and, seizing a broom, she flew at him in such a rage that Rackstraw darted hurriedly from the room.

It was an ignominious retreat, but he felt better than he had for many a day. He had been honest with himself and with the Irish girl; and honesty was so ingrained in the sailor's character that dishonesty in himself or another made him miserable.

"I've been makin' a lunkhead o' myself," was his frank avowal. "I'm as big a fool, er a bigger, than the man that throws himself into the lake because his girl goes back on him."

"I don't allow that Miss Lilly will ever be anything to me ag'in!" and he heaved a deep sigh, "but that ain't no reason that I should go round makin' a dead-gasted fool out'n myself. An' that's what I've been a-doin'. I hain't half 'tended to my work, an' have gone round tryin' to make love to every purty girl I run across."

"As if Miss Lilly could keer fer that! She would only despise me, if she knowed it. An' I was fool enough to think mebber it'd bring her back to me. Which goes to show that Jack Rackstraw has got a good 'eal to learn yit."

"If she wants that Dakoty clod-hopper, of course she kin take him. An', judgin' by what I've seen an' heered, I reckon she wants him!"

Rackstraw heaved another deep sigh.

It was easy enough to talk of resigning Lilly Lilac to another, but it was not so easy to do it.

The more Jack thought of it, the more he felt that for him, life would lose all its happiness, if Miss Lilly should become the wife of another; and, driven half frantic by the thought of what losing her meant, he resolved to again visit her.

But not until the coming of evening could he screw his courage to the sticking place.

Lilly Lilac had changed her place of abode, but Jack knew where she was to be found. However, when he gained the street in front of the house, he lingered for a long time in dubious hesitation, and once turned on his heel to walk away.

He might have done so had he not seen Miss Lilly come out into the yard.

It was at that witching hour dear to lovers, twixt daylight and darkness.

Jack Rackstraw's heart gave a great thump, when he beheld her; and when he observed her begin to pace to and fro uneasily, and fancied her distress was occasioned by her uncertainty concerning the fate of Christopher Columbus Stubbs, a great sense of yearning overwhelmed him.

A heroic impulse carried him through the gate, and, before it had failed him, Miss Lilly turned and saw him coming.

Retreat was now out of the question, and Jack Rackstraw advanced with what bravery he could.

"I 'low you're surprised to see me here, Miss Lilly," he declared, walking along by her side. "But, hang it all! I jist couldn't stay away, and that's the fact! I've been a-tryin' to, most powerful bad; but I couldn't stand it no longer. Of course, I'm a fool fer comin'."

"I'm glad you came, Jack. I've been wantin' to see you about the boy."

He was surprised and touched, beyond measure. He had not hoped for such kindness.

"Let's sit down there," he said, pointing to some chairs. "We can talk better."

He felt awkward, wandering about the unfamiliar grounds.

"You haven't heard anything of the boy?" she questioned, taking one of the chairs indicated.

"Not a word," said Jack, "though I'm havin' big hopes. Clingstone is hot on the trail of them fellers!"

He was wondering how to begin on the subject nearest his heart.

"I reckon you never was so surprised, as when I came in through that gate!" he asserted. "I kinder surprised mysef by doin' of it. Of course, I know that I hain't got any show, by the side of that Dakoty chap; but, all the same, I though I'd jist come an' have another talk with you, anyhow."

A smile came to her face, and Jack flushed really.

"I know that you're the best and honestest fellow in the world, Jack!" she said, giving him a look that lifted him into the seventh heaven of happiness. "I suppose you won't believe it, when I say that I think a great deal of you, and have all along. And your very honesty is one of the things I so admire."

This was pouring coals of fire on poor Jack's head.

"I hain't deservin' of that a'tall," he protested, "fer they hain't a honest bone in my body. If you jist knowed what I been a-doin', Miss Lilly!"

"What have you been doing?" she asked, with incredulous sympathy.

Jack struggled with his confession, and reddened and coughed.

"Well, I've been tryin' to make love to every blessed woman that'd talk to me; and it was all on account o' you! I reckon I was mad, er crazy, er something. But I thought mebber it would spite ye, an' make ye quit flirtin' with that Dakoty farmer."

He twisted uneasily in his chair, and plucked nervously at his beard.

Lilly Lilac seemed hurt and pained.

"I'm ashamed to tell it," Jack went on. "But I told mysef I'd own up everything, and I'm a-go'in' to. There was one girl, down at the Irish Village, that I flirted with owdaciously. An' she got finally jealous as fire; an' she grabbed me by the hair, one day, an' jammed my head ag'inst the floor."

An amused smile had come to replace the look of pain. And now Lilly Lilac broke into a laugh that caused Rackstraw to flush redder than ever.

"Served you right!" was her assertion.

"An' then I went back on her," continued Jack. "An' when I told her that we was quits, an' that I'd only been foolishin' with her, she took the broom to me."

To Rackstraw it was a humiliating confession; and his humiliation grew, as Lilly laughed the louder.

"But I'm done with that kind o' nonsense!"

"I don't suppose that you—that you'll ever be anything to me ag'in, Miss Lilly; but I'm goin' to act the man, anyhow!"

"There's somebody comin'," said Miss Lilac, in warning tones.

Rackstraw looked up and saw an officer step through the gateway.

The officer held some papers in his hand, from which he extracted one, as he advanced up the walk.

He halted in front of Rackstraw and Lilly, and inquired, as he came forward with the paper:

"Mr. Rackstraw, I believe?"

"The same," said Jack, "at your service."

"Then I have something for you."

Jack's thought was that the man had brought a communication from Chicago Charlie.

"Listen to orders!" he cried, turning to Lilly, with affected gayety.

But Jack's pleasant manner turned to one of astonishment.

The paper was a summons, in a case wherein Meg Malone was plaintiff, and Jack Rackstraw defendant. The Irish girl had brought suit for the sum of ten thousand dollars, for alleged damaged affections.

Rackstraw turned as white as a sheet, as the officer read the paper aloud.

"Serves me right!" he declared, though his voice shook. "A feller was never yit giddy, but that he had to pay for it. If I could 'a' found that patent kickin' machine, er if the fool-killer had 'a' collared me a week ago, I'd 'a' been better off!"

In his eyes, he was forever a ruined man!

CHAPTER XXXV.

MOLL BUNDY'S SINGULAR ACTIONS.

"You could 'a' knocked me down with a feather!" Rackstraw confessed, speaking to Lilly Lilac, when the officer had departed. "Who'd ever 'a' dreamed o' sich a thing. But when a feller gits giddy, there hain't no tellin' what's goin' to happen him! I've been that giddy that I reckon I ort to be hung!"

Lilly looked at him with wide-open eyes.

"You must have carried your giddiness pretty far, Jack!"

"No fuder than I told you! Ten-thousand dollars! Phew!"

Visions of financial and moral bankruptcy rose before him.

But, worse than all, was the humiliation that had been brought on him in the presence of the one woman he loved. He could have stood anything, better than that!

"I reckon I'd be doin' the sens'ble thing, if I'd go off an' throw mysef into the lake, Miss Lilly! You kin never think kindly o' me ag'in, an' I don't blame you. It's all my fault! Ten thousand dollars!"

The magnitude of the sum demanded paralyzed his mental faculties.

A glance of sympathy came into Lilly's face.

"But you were true to me in your thoughts, Jack?"

"Never was anybody truer! I never keered fer any woman but you, as I've told you hundreds of times, I allow. There never was any woman that was as handsome, 'cordin' to my way of thinkin'! But that's all over, now. You'll never want to look at me ag'in, after that!"

"How do you know I won't, Jack?"

Lilly Lilac's voice was low and tender, and its intonations thrilled him.

"Could you love me ag'in, Miss Lilly?" he cried, lifting his voice above the needs of the occasion.

There was a sound in the shrubbery, not far distant, and Miss Lilly's keen eyes saw a man enter it.

She knew he had not been there a moment before. The man was Uncle Steve. She knew also, that Uncle Steve had heard the sailor's question.

A shade passed over her face, and its manner changed.

"You shouldn't ask me that, Jack!" she replied, also in a higher tone than was necessary.

"You won't believe me ag'in! I knowed you wouldn't!"

"How can I, Jack?" and there was a sharpness in the tone. "How can I, after that? I guess you'll have to go back to your Irish girl!"

Rackstraw looked at her, all his new-born hopes crushed.

"Very well! It serves me right! But I'll allus think well o' you, Miss Lilly! Alwus! You can't help me doin' that!"

"I don't want to help i', Jack!" was her low and earnest declaration.

Jack was surprised to see a tear in her eyes; but, foolish fellow that he was! he was not an expert in such matters, and went from her, with a breaking heart.

He was no sooner out of sight than Uncle Stephen made his appearance, coming, as it seemed, from the walk that led through the grounds, though Miss Lilly knew he had only emerged from the shrubbery.

"I seen you turn that feller away!" he cried jubilantly.

"He's been deceiving me!" Lilly averred. "He's been playin' with the affections of a girl at the Irish Village, and she has brought a damage suit against him."

Uncle Stephen rubbed his hands.

"Serves the rascal right. Serves him right. I've been afraid, sometimes, that you was still, as you might say, thinkin' too much of him."

Though, I don't reely see why you should. He's only a sailor!"

"And you are?"

"A farmer an' ranchman, Miss Lilac," swelling proudly. "A farmer an' ranchman of the Jim River Valley. An' a farmer an' ranchman of the Jim River, is—well, he's better than a sailor!"

"Indeed!" and Miss Lilac gave a saucy toss to her head. "I never had such a great opinion of farmers and ranchmen. I always thought ranchmen were a kind of cowboys!"

"There you're mistaken! There you're mistaken! A cowboy is a—"

"You haven't heard anything yet of the boy?" she inquired.

"Not a blessed thing, though I've hunted this town high an' I've hunted it low."

"Have you offered rewards?"

"Five thousand dollars. But the reward don't seem to bring the little chap."

"Then, no Dakota ranch for me!"

"Oh, come, now!" he argued. "What's the use o' stickin' to that? If the boy can't be found—why! he can't; an' that ends it!"

"Not with me, Uncle Steve! The boy must be found! You must bring him back to me!"

"Oh, come!" he urged, striving to take her hand. "Come, now! Don't be unreasonable!"

Another person had crept into the shrubbery, even as Uncle Steve had crept a few moments before.

This person was Moll Bundy, who fixed a basilisk-like gaze on Lilly Lilac. There was a knife in the hands of the woman, and she gripped it with startling nervousness.

There was murder in the look that Moll Bundy gave Lilly Lilac; and any one seeing her stand thus, glaring out through the interstices, would have set her down as a madwoman.

Moll Bundy's hand crept to her bosom, where the pistol rested, as Uncle Steve continued his pleading. But she did not turn her gaze on Uncle Steve. It was filled with a deadly hate, and it was reserved for Lilly Lilac.

The hand was drawn out, and the pistol came with it.

Then there was a flash and a report.

Lilly Lilac sprung up with a scream, and Moll Bundy, seeing that the work was not well done, rushed on her with uplifted knife.

The frightened girl turned in flight, and, tripping, fell prostrate.

The pistol bullet had struck the chair, tearing splinters from it, one of which had scratched Lilly's hand, bringing a flow of blood. But, otherwise, she had not been injured.

"Hey! Hey! Let up on that!" Uncle Stephen cried, rushing in just in time, and clutching Moll Bundy by the throat. "Let up on that, will ye? What you tryin' to do?"

"I'll kill her!" Moll Bundy panted, struggling to free herself.

Lilly Lilac, dreadfully frightened, had leaped up and was scudding away.

"Let me go, I tell you! Let me go! I'll kill her!"

But the strong hand of Uncle Steve increased its pressure.

The servants and inmates of the house were aroused, and their footsteps were heard.

Moll Bundy struck at Uncle Steve with the knife, and he hurled her from him.

Then she scrambled to her feet, and disappeared, running like a deer through the garden and down to the street.

It was a most singular and seemingly inexplicable attack.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE SHADOWS OF THE WHARF.

"Sir! there's some one coming!"

Billy Stubbs and Chicago Charley were crouching in a boat beneath the long wharf,—the wharf that had so often hidden the retreating form of Captain Clover.

They had gained the place, a number of hours before, and the wait had been tedious and trying.

Billy Stubbs was now the trusted helper of Chicago Charley, having been chosen by the detective to assist him in the work of running down Captain Clover and laying bare the mystery of the long wharf.

A more valuable ally no one could have desired. Billy was keen and shrewd, and wise in such matters beyond his years. He delighted in detective work, and, therefore, was a success. No one ever succeeds at anything who does not take a certain delight and joy in his tasks.

They had reached the point where they were now crouching, by entering from the lake further out from the shore.

This had been done to avoid chance observation by Clover and his men.

When that warning fell from the lips of the Columbian Detective, Billy Stubbs crouched still lower, and used eyes and ears as well as he could.

The view was very circumscribed, but he could hear as well under there, in the gloom, as if out on the open lake; and he now caught the sounds of cautious footsteps.

Captain Clover had come down to the edge of the wharf; and, seeing no spies in the vicinity, had crept beneath the wharf, and was now advancing along the piece of timber that led to the secret door.

Chicago Charley almost held his breath in anticipation. He felt he was on the verge of a great discovery. It was the first time he had seen any one advance under there in that way, and his intuition told him that here was one of the diamond thieves.

Captain Clover walked boldly, though quietly, along, until the end of the timber was gained.

Instead of rapping and giving a call, he pushed on a post that stood against the bank, and, at the pressure, the hidden door swung inward on its well-oiled hinges, and the captain disappeared into the gloom.

Chicago Charlie was so close that he saw the act and beheld the deeper gloom indicating the opening into the tunnel.

His pulses thrilled with a sense of indefinable pleasure.

Here was the thing he had so long sought. Here was the entrance to the concealed retreat. He had long been convinced that, somewhere, under that wharf, there was an opening, or hiding, but never before had he been able to find a trace, or even the suggestion of a trace of it.

He remained as quiet as the pilings themselves, until the door swung to with the same noiselessness and Captain Clover vanished.

"Eureka!" he jubilantly whispered. "That's the thing we've been looking for!"

Billy sat upright, now, fully as excited as his superior.

The Columbian Detective dipped the paddles cautiously, and sent the boat slowly forward, until it touched the timber.

Here he moored it, and then crept upon the timber and placed his hands on the piling that he had seen the captain press.

It was not a piling, as he had thought, but a post, unconnected in any way with the wharf.

Strangely enough, when he pressed strongly on the post, it gave under the pressure, and the hidden door turned slowly on its hinges until the black opening was revealed!

The Columbian Detective could scarcely repress a whoop of joy.

"Pull the boat back, and stay there until I returned."

But this was a thing Billy Stubbs was unwilling to do. There was a promise of excitement ahead, and he wanted to be in it. He also wanted to share whatever peril might be encountered, for he knew that Chicago Charlie meant to enter and explore the depths back of the opening.

"You might need me," he urged. "Oh, can't I go 'long, Mr. Clingstone?"

It was true that the Columbian Detective might need the aid to be had.

"Then, pull the boat back to where we were, and fasten it. I guess you'll have to swim or wade back here. It won't do to leave the boat at this point. Other members of the band may come along and discover it. Then, we'd be in a box."

His words did not rise above a whisper.

The boy glanced dubiously at the dark water, but he nevertheless pushed the boat back. And, when he had secured it there, he slipped down a piling into the waves. Fortunately the water was shoal and scarcely reached to his armpits so that the work of return was not difficult.

Then the two crawled, snake-like, into the tunnel.

"How we're to close that door is more than I know," said the detective, speaking in the same cautious manner. "But it will hardly do to leave it open."

This was so manifest that he began an immediate search with his hands, thinking to strike on some spring or lever. But when he tried the door he found that it closed without difficulty.

"The question will be how to get out of here, I expect," was his thought. "It's easy enough for a rat to walk into a trap, but not so easy for him to go out the way he came in. It would be a go, if we should find ourselves in the same fix!"

He was on the point of trying the door, to see if it would open without trouble from the inside, when a noise from the direction of the cavern alarmed him; and they both drew back further in the tunnel.

The sound was not repeated; and, after a few moments of crouching in fear, they crept along the underground way, feeling every step before them as they advanced.

Not knowing what to expect, Chicago Charlie held his revolver drawn ready for any emergency.

In a little while a light from the cavern reached them, and they saw some one moving about before it.

It was Moll Bundy, who was preparing a late supper for some of the men, by the aid of the gasoline stove.

These men, one of whom was Captain Clover, were to be seen, when a further advance had been made.

Then Billy Stubbs tremulously grasped Chicago Charlie by the arm.

"Look there!" was his excited exclamation. "Bless me, if it ain't the Infant Wonder! An' he a-settin' up there as if he was the king-pin of the whole caboodle!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

PERILOUS SPYING.

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS STUBBS was mounted on a tall dry-goods box, close to Moll Bundy, and was watching with big round eyes the preparations that were going forward for the evening meal. And the eyes were not only big and round, but they were sunken, and the child had a gaunt and unhealthy appearance.

Confinement in the gloom of the underground den was telling on the health of the Infant Wonder; though that was not the only thing that had served to change his appearance. His constant fear of Captain Clover was perhaps chiefest in his list of miseries.

But in Moll Bundy he had found a friend and a defender, on whom he felt he could rely; and he always kept near to Moll Bundy's heels, when she was in the cavern.

Those were dark times for Christopher Columbus Stubbs, when Moll Bundy was away, for then he was sworn at and kicked and cuffed by everybody.

But Moll Bundy did not leave the cavern so frequently as she had been formerly accustomed to do. Probably for the reason that she knew of the abuse the Infant Wonder was subjected to in her absence.

"Tan I have a piece o' dat?" the Infant Wonder questioned, pointing to a piece of meat in a dish.

"Jist hear him!" was Billy's ecstatic whisper. "Hain't that as nachel as life! Dog on it! how I'd like to pull him over here an' hug him. But he's lookin' tremenjous pore! Reckon they've been a-starvin' him? It does me good, though, to know he's alive!"

Chicago Charlie pressed a hand against the boy's arm as a warning for him to be cautious.

But Billy Stubbs was so bubbling over with joy that it was extremely difficult for him to hold his peace.

The Columbian Detective saw that the cavern was half-filled with loose earth, that seemed to have been brought there recently. There was also a pile of this earth near them in the tunnel, and they had stumbled over and crowded against other similar piles in making their way through.

He was at a loss to account for the presence of these huge mounds of loose earth.

But the matter was cleared up by the words of Captain Clover.

"This is Friday night, boys, and everything is working smooth. We'll surprise the Fair managers to-night! Where is Walton?"

This last was addressed to Moll Bundy. Walton was the guard who was usually stationed at the door of the tunnel. But now, while work was being pushed so vigorously, he had been drafted into service in the new tunnels.

"He's setting up them timbers where you feared there might be a cave-in. Under the bank, you know! The dirt was runnin' in there, Walton said, and he went back there to fix the braces."

"And Barton Brown?"

"He hain't come in yet."

The captain seemed in great good humor. Chicago Charlie was hearkening closely, and at Moll Bundy's last reply he nervously clutched the arm of his boy companion.

"Barton Brown hasn't come in, yet. You heard that?" he whispered. "Keep a watch back along the tunnel. You mustn't let him stumble over us."

He was grateful for the big mound of dirt at the tunnel's side. In the rear of it, or at the side of it, they might safely crouch in concealment.

"Slip this way," he commanded. "If we get over here, Barton will not fall over us, anyway, and by flattening ourselves out we're not likely to be seen."

Billy obeyed.

But no sounds came from the direction of the tunnel's entrance, to show that Barton Brown was approaching, or was anywhere near.

Both turned their attention again to the occupants of the cavern.

Moll Bundy had fished out the piece of meat that the Infant Wonder had craved, and that small individual was now chewing on it in great gusto.

Billy Stubbs chuckled with delight.

"Hain't that jist tip-top?" he demanded. "It do seem that woman's good to him. I wonder who she is! I'd like to make her acquaintance an' shake her by the hand, jist on account of the Infant. Lilly Lilac'll be prouder than a princess when I tell her o' this!"

The queries and ejaculations were not directed to Chicago Charlie. Rather, they were thought, for Billy was as circumspect as the older detective. And talk would not only render them liable to discovery, but would keep them from hearing what was being said in the cavern.

"It won't be no use to try to rake in Davis,

to-night!" Captain Clover said, directing his remarks to Kimberley Ben. "He isn't in his office, to-night. But to-morrow night we can work it, I think, without any trouble. To-night, we'll tackle the bank!"

"Plans all ready, eh?" Kimberley questioned, showing his white teeth.

"Everything!" and the captain chuckled, gleefully. "Then, we'll know whether to hole up here another night or not. It will depend. If we can work it as slick as we did the diamond business, we're all right. But I don't like it, the way those detectives have been hanging about the wharf. I'm all the time afraid they'll tumble to our little racket, in spite of its cuteness."

Again there was in the captain's voice the singular and suggestive intonation that Chicago Charlie had previously noted, but it was as baffling as ever.

In entering the room where Davenish & Company had their diamond vault, the band of Captain Clover had tunneled beneath the room, even as they had now tunneled beneath the vault of the bank they hoped to break.

They had then removed a section of the floor, and had succeeded in replacing it so neatly that the work had never yet been discovered.

The captain's present plans were of a similar character.

"If anything should happen to cause a failure to-night, we'll strike for Davis to-morrow night."

"Then, you'd risk holding him here?" Kimberley asked.

"If suspicion wasn't drawn too strongly in this direction, yes! Otherwise, we'd have to make a change of base. I should hate to have to do that, though, for this is the snuggest and safest den I was ever in. It's so well hidden that the best men of the detective force have walked right over it a dozen times, and never dreamed what they were doing."

"It's a good one," Kimberley asserted.

Captain Clover was the originator of the idea, and he was always proud of the fact. It was an exceedingly clever idea, and had been most skillfully carried out; though at the cost of many months of labor.

While the big buildings were being erected and thousands of workmen had thronged the grounds of the growing White City, every night Captain Clover and his associates had worked at the tunnel and the cave with all the energy of beavers. And the very secrecy with which they had been forced to labor had made the toil doubly hard.

Clover, Kimberley and Colwood drew their stools up to the table, which Moll Bundy had laid, and began to devour the food placed thereon.

The Infant Wonder was not neglected, though Clover's only attention to the child was a fierce scowl, now and then. But Moll Bundy liberally supplied the wants of Christopher Columbus Stubbs, to the great delight of Billy Stubbs.

"Hurrah, fer the Infant Wonder!" was his mental ejaculation. "Jist see him handle that fork, will ye? It's eal to a show. If I was a reporter, now, I could make a sensaish out'n this part o' the night's performance. See him saw the bacon with his knife!"

He was so pleased, that it was with the greatest difficulty he restrained these exuberant manifestations.

Chicago Charlie, hearing a lowly-muttered word, now and then, touched Billy on the shoulder, as a warning to caution.

"I've been afraid that that big pillar would cave in the tunnel," Captain Clover remarked, as he saw Walton coming out of the tunnel, where he had been concealed for a long time. "You know it stands just at the corner of the bank building!"

Chicago Charlie started. This gave him the information he had so desired, the location of the point of the tunnel beneath the bank. He knew now where to look for the blow that Captain Clover was planning.

"How is it?" Clover asked, as Walton came forward to the table.

"All right, now; though the sand was runnin' in some, when I went out there!"

"She'll hold till after the job's done, eh? Well, that will be enough! Though I'd rather it would hold all the while. We may not want to vacate here!"

"I don't know but we'd better get out of this!" the Columbian Detective whispered. "They've got their plans all laid, and there's no telling how soon they may strike. We must be there, ready to rake them in."

There was just the faintest trace of triumph in his whispered words. He had toiled long and hard, and often almost hopelessly, to gain the point and the information he had now secured. It was a triumph worth being proud of.

"Jist as you say," Billy whispered back, in the same low tone. "Whenever you're ready, I am. But I do wish I could take the Infant Wonder! I hate jist awfully to leave him in hyer! I reckon there ain't no way 'at it could be worked?"

"None! It would be the height of folly to seriously think of such a thing. He seems to

be safe; and, we'll hope that, in a few hours, we'll be able to get him."

Billy knew that it was nonsense to dream of the rescue of the boy, at that time, but his glances did not, because of that, become the less wistful.

"I could jist hug that woman!" he thought, looking again at Moll Bundy, who was at the moment heaping the plate of Christopher Columbus Stubbs with the best on the table. "She can't be so bad a lot; though she's with a mighty bad crowd."

Then he was forced to turn his gaze away, for Chicago Charlie was "crawfishing" along the route they had come, and he was forced to use all his faculties to make this retreat safe.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A THRILLING ENCOUNTER.

"SH!"

The warning came from Chicago Charlie, who was in advance.

They were near the closed door of the outer entrance, and the sounds that had brought the warning from the detective's lips had seemed to come from beyond this door.

Billy Stubbs flattened himself against the damp earth of the tunnel.

Chicago Charlie crept beside him; then moved to one side of the low and narrow tunnel, pulling at Billy's sleeve.

The boy understood the movement, and slipped along, silently as a cat.

"There's some one coming!" the Columbian Detective whispered. "I suppose it's Barton Brown. Get down here by this pile of dirt."

He pushed Billy to the place indicated, and then crouched low. He had drawn his revolver again, and now cocked it.

There was a light step on the timber in front of the door; then a moment's pause, in which they waited in breathless anticipation; then the door slowly moved, and the form of a man was revealed, dimly outlined in the opening.

It was Barton Brown, who had found it impossible to come sooner, though the commands of Captain Clover, on this point, had been imperative.

Brown did not dream of the spies that lay so near him, as he stood for the moment outlined in the tunnel's mouth.

Then the door turned noiselessly behind him, shutting him in.

He advanced, as one used to the way, and would have passed the spies without once becoming distrustful, but for a careless movement on the part of Billy Stubbs.

The boy had incautiously allowed his feet to project into the tunnel, in such a way that Barton would have been almost forced to trip against them; and, discovering this, Billy drew them in.

The movement was heard by Brown, who instantly stopped, in a listening attitude.

Chicago Charlie and Billy Stubbs both dreaded discovery as the worst ill that could then befall them, and they lay as still as possible, scarcely daring to breathe.

"I wonder if that was a cave-in, or something else!" they heard Brown mutter.

Then the light of a match, which Brown struck, flashed blindingly in their faces.

At the moment, Barton Brown was not a yard distant.

But Chicago Charlie was not caught napping.

When Barton Brown looked over the match to investigate the supposed cave-in, his eyes looked squarely into the deadly tube of the detective's cocked revolver.

"Move, or utter a sound and I'll put a ball through you!"

The words were fierce, in their intense earnestness.

Brown whitened like a corpse. He realized that never in his life had he been in such peril as in that instant.

"Billy, tie him!"

The command galvanized the frightened man into new life.

He dropped the sputtering match, and started to run.

But the detective's hand clutched him, and he came down sprawling, and with such force that the breath was knocked out of him.

Before he could recover sufficiently to struggle or call out for help, he was bound fast and snug, and gagged so that he could not make a sound.

But the danger to the detective was not by any means ended.

The sounds of the fall and scuffle had reached Captain Clover and the men, who were still at supper in the cavern; and Chicago Charlie and Billy Stubbs heard these hurrying now toward the entrance.

Barton Brown also showed that he had heard the sounds, for he began to kick and flounce.

"None of that!" the Columbian Detective warningly commanded.

And, with this, he grabbed Barton by the collar and pulled him in behind the pile of earth.

There was scant room in there for the con-

cealment of the three, but the detectives, nevertheless, crowded in beside the prostrate and helpless man, where they remained, flattened against the wet ground, panting and breathless.

Their danger was supremely great, though Chicago Charlie believed that, should worse come to worst, he could hold Clover's men at bay until he and the boy could make their escape.

It may be questioned why he did not make a rush for the door, now, and thus get away, while there still seemed time.

To have done that would have balked the consummation of the task at which they had so long labored. They could not drag Barton Brown with them; and of course he would have revealed to Clover what had occurred.

Even if Chicago Charlie had been sufficiently bloody-minded to shoot him—which he was not—it would have been of no avail; for the shot and the discovery of the body would have told Clover almost as much.

Hence, there was but one thing to do; and that was to lay low in the tunnel, and trust to luck to keep Clover and his men from discovering them. It seemed a slender hope, but it was all Chicago Charlie had to trust to.

If Clover once became aware that his secret retreat was no longer secret, he would naturally abandon it and give up the work planned for that night, and to find him again might not be an easy matter.

It was thus that Chicago Charlie had argued, though the train of argument flashed through his mind in much less time than it takes to read this.

And in addition, there was the uncertainty concerning the closed door. They had no surety that the door could be opened readily, from the inside.

As he crouched down at the side of Barton, Chicago Charlie pressed the cold muzzle against the head of the terrified wretch.

"If you so much as wriggle, I'll pull the trigger of this pistol and blow your brains out!"

He could feel Barton shrink from the muzzle and tremble under the sense of his great danger.

Captain Clover and his men were now fairly within the tunnel, and coming on rapidly. Worse than all, the flashing form of a bull's-eye lantern gleamed along the gloomy corridor.

Clover was saying nothing, but was watching the walls with keen glance.

He stopped short, while yet a dozen short paces from Chicago Charlie.

"Ah! I guess this was it!" the Columbian Detective was relieved to hear him say. "This brace has given way, and a lot of dirt has slumped down here! Well, that won't matter! I reckon I was a bit nervous!"

He laughed uneasily, showing how nervous he really was.

The cold muzzle of the detective's revolver pressed hard against the temple of Barton Brown, effectually stilling him. Neither Billy nor his superior scarcely dared to breathe.

A great many of the timbers and a number of very necessary braces had been removed from this tunnel to be used in those recently constructed, and consequently there had been numerous cavings of the earth. But for this, Chicago Charlie and Billy Stubbs could not have escaped easily.

However, this fact, so well known to Captain Clover, caused the captain to readily accept a cave-in as the real cause of the sounds that had been heard. And it must be admitted, the explanation appeared reasonable.

Clover flashed the light of the bull's-eye on the yielding timbers and critically inspected them. He saw that other points must yield sooner or later, for there were a number of ominous bulgings and places where the earth had slipped.

Only that it had been necessary to remove these timbers, Captain Clover would not have taken such risks; but the fear of the detectives had been sufficient cause.

"Well, we'll not need to stay in this hole a great while longer!" and he gave a breath of relief. "If we were thinking of that, I'd say we'd be bound to fix these, in spite of the danger of getting new timbers. But if the thing caves in and gives the snap away, after we're gone, I don't know that we need cry about it. The place has served us well."

How intensely Barton Brown longed to make some sound that should acquaint the captain with his presence and condition, can be imagined. But that cold bit of threatening steel held him quiet. So near, and yet so far from Barton Brown, was Captain Clover and his men.

Having made this declaration, the captain looked no further, being satisfied that they had found the true solution; but turned back along the tunnel toward the cavern.

Brown found it almost impossible to resist the temptation to make a struggle. But the pistol pressed still harder against his head, and he crowded down his desires and lay still.

"Now, we'll see if we can get out of this!" Chicago Charlie whispered, when the captain and his associates were gone.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

SPRINGING THE TRAP.

ALL hope vanished from the breast of Barton Brown, when he heard the captain of the band turn back toward the cavern. He had believed that Clover would advance to the end of the tunnel, when, even though he dared not cry out, the chances of his discovery would be great.

But this belief was extinguished; and only ruin and disgrace stared him in the face. Still, he was too much in fear of that big revolver to lift his voice for aid, feeling sure that, should he do so, a bullet would, in that same instant, crash through his brain.

"No foolishness, now, Barton Brown!" the Columbian Detective sternly commanded.

Then he ordered Brown to get on his feet, after the cord had been loosed.

The gag had not been removed, such a thing being deemed too risky.

Billy Stubbs led the way to the hidden door, Chicago Charlie bringing up the rear, and driving Barton in advance of him by low threats.

Billy fumbled about the door, but was not able to find the spring that controlled its movements; nor did better success attend the efforts of Chicago Charlie.

"See here, Barton!" the latter said, sternly. "We've got to get out of here, and you've got to show us how. If you don't, you'll wish that you had, I'll untie your hands, and you've got to open the door for us!"

Barton stood motionless.

It was not possible to read the expression of his face.

Chicago Charlie felt that what he was about to do was a risky performance, but he saw no other way to get out of the tunnel; and the flying moments were too precious to spend more of them in a useless search. So he untied the hands of the captured thief, and, then, shoving the revolver again against Brown's head, bade him open the door.

Brown seemed on the point of refusing, until he felt the threatening steel again pressing his temple, when his hesitation vanished.

The spring was concealed in the door, itself, being so carefully hidden that its discovery would have been extremely difficult; but Brown knew just the panel to press against; and the door came open.

"If you're thinking of trying to make a break, Barton Brown, let me advise you not to do it!" said Chicago Charlie, when they had passed through, and the door had swung back to its place. "I assure you that it will not be healthy. I suppose you put a little value on your life, even though you are a prisoner. Therefore, I give you fair warning. If you make a break, you must take the consequences. I'm not in a mood to fool to-night!"

There was something so stern and earnest in the words, that Barton Brown abandoned whatever desire he might have had in that line, thinking that life, with imprisonment, was better than death at the hands of the officer.

Billy Stubbs carefully waded out to the boat and drew it to the shore. Then Barton Brown was placed in it, and his hands again tied, and the detectives set out with their prisoner, heading for the patrol launch, as soon as they were clear of the wharf.

The launch was at its usual place, near the wharf; and Chicago Charlie, steering the row-boat to its side, called out for assistance.

A very gratified set of men, were the officers on the launch, when Barton Brown was brought on board, bound in that fashion, and Chicago Charlie recounted the adventures of himself and Billy Stubbs.

"And they strike to-night, eh?" queried the captain of the launch, rubbing his hands exultantly. "Egad, Clingstone! But this will be a feather in your cap. I suppose you've your ideas in shape as to what you want to do?"

"Yes," Chicago Charlie returned, gratified by the captain's manner. "I'll want you to furnish me a lot of men, and we'll rake the rascals in, as they make their raid on the bank."

"Do you suppose the absence of this fellow will interfere with their plans? Cause a postponement?"

The Columbian Detective was of the opinion, and this opinion was based on what he had seen and heard that night in the tunnel, that Captain Clover would proceed with the work, regardless of the absence of Barton Brown.

He expressed this opinion to the captain; and then Barton Brown was led below, to be questioned by the officer in charge of the launch.

But Brown could tell little; or, perhaps, he would tell but a little, for it was natural that he should desire to shield his late comrades as much as possible.

Notwithstanding Barton-Brown's reticence, preparations were at once made for placing a number of good men in the threatened bank, under command of the Columbian Detective, and another company of good men beneath the wharf at the mouth of the tunnel, to prevent any of Clover's associates from breaking away.

Chicago Charlie was glad to see Jack Rack-

straw aboard the launch that night, for not a better man than Rackstraw for such work could have been found in Chicago.

Rackstraw was pleased beyond measure, when told that he was to be of the detective's party and second in command; and the gloomy moroseness that had weighed him down since his last interview with Lilly Lilac seemed to vanish.

Billy Stubbs was, also, to be of Chicago Charlie's party; and, if Uncle Steve had been available, the Columbian Quartette would have been fully represented.

"I say!" said Billy, placing himself in front of the Columbian Detective, at the first opportunity. "It will be all right, will it, if I run up and whisper to Miss Lilly about the Infant Wonder? She'd like to know it!"

His face was beaming in anticipation of the happiness to be derived from this mission.

"Well; but you must be extra careful. Come straight back to the launch; and, if we're gone, follow cautiously. It won't do for the rascals to get wind of what we're up to."

Billy Stubbs understood this full well, and readily gave the required promise: after which he set out for the house where Lilly was stopping, swelling hopefully with the knowledge that Christopher Columbus Stubbs was still safe.

And so highly gratified was Lilly Lilac with the information brought by the newsboy spy that she quitted the house, in great excitement and returned to the grounds of the Columbian Exposition with Billy, even though the hour was so extremely late.

She wanted to be near, when the raid was made on the tunnel, so that she might be one of the very first to clasp the Infant Wonder.

She remained on the patrol launch, eaten up by impatience, when the men slipped away, under command of Chicago Charlie. They did not go as a band, but singly, sneaking along to avoid all observation.

The officers of this bank within the World's Fair grounds had been notified of the expected raid, and everything was quickly put in readiness to give Captain Clover's men a warm reception.

Chicago Charlie and Rackstraw, with three others, stationed themselves in the room holding the vault, though it was a close and stuffy place, and a stronger force was placed near and within easy call.

The wait that ensued was very wearing. The minutes and hours moved on leaden wings. Never had time so dragged.

Captain Clover showed that he was in no hurry to commence this bit of work, and Chicago Charlie finally began to fear that an inkling of the nature of the trap set might have reached the burglar captain.

The grounds of the great Exposition became still—as still as the quiet of the early hours preceding the dawn could make them—and still Chicago Charlie and his men anxiously watched and waited.

Then a dull sound came from almost beneath the feet of the Columbian Detective.

It was muffled and faint, but it was repeated; and it soon became evident that the toilers of the tunnel were at work, making their way up to the floor of the vault.

The picking and blows grew louder, and finally seemed to strike dully on the stones of the floor.

Chicago Charlie and his men had drawn their revolvers, but not a man stirred from his tracks. The gloom was great, and within it they appeared as faintly outlined statues.

For more than ten minutes this low picking continued; then the stones of the floor yielded; and one, near the center of the room, slipped slowly back, revealing a cavity and a man's head.

For a moment all was still again. A hooded light was thrust up through the aperture, and the men followed the light.

Still the detectives never moved a muscle.

The man was Captain Clover, who, blinded by the gloom, failed to see the forms in the room.

"It's all right!" he was heard to whisper. "The way is clear. Swing up here, and let's get through the thing, now, as quick as we can."

He drew back, and another man swung upward through the opening.

Chicago Charlie recognized this second man as Kimberley Ben.

Kimberley was followed by Tom Colwood.

At that moment there came a thundering explosion. One of the pistols had been fired.

The detectives had stood ready, with their cocked revolvers in their hands. The long suspense and excitement had unstrung the nerves of even the coolest; and one of them had been so affected that his shaky fingers had closed on the pistol trigger, without him being aware of it, and the explosion was the result.

In the same instant, the light of the lantern went out, amid a shivering of glass, and Captain Clover and his men tumbled blindly back into the tunnel.

CHAPTER XL.

SEARCHING THE TUNNELS.

THERE was a blaze of light, and the revolvers of the officers vomited their contents at the black hole into which Captain Clover and his followers had tumbled; but the bullets might as well have been saved. They were only flattened on the floor and against the stones about the tunnel's mouth and on the walls. Not a man of Clover's band was touched.

"After them!" Chicago Charlie commanded, mentally anathematizing the man whose nervousness had brought matters to a sudden crisis. "Into the tunnel after them!"

He scratched a match and threw it down into the hole, to ascertain what sort of a place they were about to enter; and then, becoming calmer, proceeded to light a police lantern.

It must be confessed that he had been thrown pretty well from the perpendicular by this unexpected turn of affairs.

"I don't think they can get away from us, unless they have another passage leading from the cavern, in addition to the one opening on the lake."

There was a chance of this, and it made him anxious; so, as soon as the lantern was in readiness, he dropped into hole, revolver in hand, ready to lead the way.

The peril of this advance was slight, as he well knew, but Chicago Charlie was never a man to order others to go where he feared to go himself; and now he was the first in the tunnel.

It was an exceedingly cramped and uncomfortable place, not nearly so large as the tunnel leading to the lake. That had been constructed for constant use, and this only for a temporary purpose.

"We'll have to make a crawl of it!" and Clingstone got down on his hands and knees, and then on his stomach, and hitched along through the contracted space, pushing the revolver and the lantern before him.

He was glad, now, that there were reliable men at the lake-end of the bigger tunnel, for the chances were not good in here, either for fighting or capturing the rascals they were pursuing. But, if there was no other outlet, Captain Clover's band must ultimately surrender.

Chicago Charlie's followers were compelled to imitate his example, and all hitched slowly forward, in that painful manner, making discouragingly slow progress.

Then to their straining ears, there came the crash of revolvers; not loud, but as if coming through walls; and they knew that the force at the lake front had come in contact with the fleeing men.

A suppressed cheer came to the lips of the officers under Chicago Charlie. And they hurried on as rapidly as the cramped tunnel would permit.

At last they emerged into the cavern, but its lights were out and it was deserted.

No; not deserted! for there sat Moll Bundy, with the child in her arms.

She had discovered that flight was out of the question, and had doggedly returned to the spot, to meet her fate.

The Infant Wonder was badly frightened and was crying.

Moll Bundy, not knowing what to expect, or who the assailants of Captain Clover had been, and bewildered by the firing from the lake entrance, held the Infant Wonder in a close embrace, as if she would shield him and was thinking more of his safety than of her own.

Billy Stubbs scrambled from the contracted tunnel and swung his hat, with a cheer.

"Hooray, for the Infant Wonder!" he whooped. "Christopher Columbus Stubbs ferever!"

The woman sprung up, wild-eyed, and dropped a hand to her bosom.

That she meant to defend herself was plainly to be seen.

"You will not be injured!" Chicago Charlie assured. "We're after the men. Which way did they go?"

As if in answer, Kimberley Ben leaped into the cavern from the lake tunnel, his black face a sickly brown, his teeth chattering and his eyes staring.

He swung a revolver, which he uplifted, when he beheld the men before him.

Kimberley was plainly revealed by the lantern carried by the Columbian Detective, as the woman and the boy had been.

"Better drop that!" Chicago Charlie sternly commanded. "If you pull trigger, we'll make a sieve out of you!"

The menace in the words caused the hand to be lowered; but Kimberley was not ready to surrender, and darted back into the gloom from which he had sprang.

Billy Stubbs, unmindful of the black—in fact unmindful of anything except the presence and safety of Christopher Columbus Stubbs—had hurried toward Moll Bundy, his hands extended.

The woman misunderstood the meaning of this movement and backed against the wall, clutching the hidden pistol.

But the Infant Wonder, in spite of the terror

that was on him, recognized Billy and stretched out his hands in a wailing cry.

Moll Bundy's set features relaxed.

"You're his brother, are ye?" she questioned, tremblingly.

"You jist may bet that I am! Hello, Infant! Don't you know me?"

Christopher Columbus wailed again and struggled in the woman's arms.

"Knows me 's well as a fly knows m'lasses!"

"Take him!" said Moll Bundy, though she yielded the boy unwillingly. "You'll find that I've never hurt a hair of his head. I'm not as good as my betters, but I'm not that kind!"

"You're all right!" Billy assured. "We know that you never hurt the Infant! An' I'm obleeged to you fer what you done fer him!"

She stared.

But there was no time given for explanations.

"Is there any other way by which that rascal can get out of here?" Chicago Charlie commanded.

She shook her head; but the men, seeing the tunnel that had been made toward the Administration Building, dived into that.

There was nothing in it to be discovered, for it had not been completed.

Then they raced along the tunnel leading to the lake; and, stumbling over Kimberley Ben, who was there in hiding, a sharp fight resulted, in which one of the officers received some severe wounds.

But Kimberley's fiery spirit was subdued, and he was held in manacles, as the party passed on toward the end of the tunnel.

They found the other detachment of officers there.

Tom Colwood had been shot and was in a serious condition, but he was the only prisoner taken. One man had broken by them, who was supposed to have been Captain Clover, and Chicago Charlie's chagrin was great, when he learned of it.

To lose Captain Clover, the king-pin of the diamond thieves, was anything but pleasing.

But there seemed no help for it, and accusations of carelessness were useless. The officers had probably done as well as they could.

Thinking that other members of the band might be in concealment in some tunnel or cave heretofore unknown, a thorough search of the underground passages was made.

There seemed to be only three tunnels; though, remembering the cunning manner in which the door opening on the lake had been concealed, Chicago Charlie could not be sure there were not many doors, whose entrances could not be discovered.

But the search, thorough as it was, failed to show them, and Moll Bundy, when questioned, professed ignorance of any such exits.

The woman had remained in a state of passive quiet, as if she felt the utter helplessness of her position. She did not plead for mercy, and seemed to expect none.

Yet, both Billy Stubbs and the Columbian Detective thought kindly of her, on account of her treatment of the Infant Wonder; and that small personage clung about her neck and fondled her, whenever Billy permitted him to leave his arms.

Moll Bundy returned these caresses, at such times only showing the faintest trace of feeling.

But it may have been that she was playing a well-acted part; for, when an opportunity came, she stole out through the tunnel, and when search was made for her, she was not to be found.

The Columbian Detective was not displeased. All indications went to prove that, in the diamond robbery, and probably also the murder of Sidney Mayfield, she had been as guilty as her male companions. The detective did not wish to see her imprisoned for these things, which she would have been if brought to trial, and so did not regret that she had succeeded in making her escape.

The Infant Wonder was inconsolable when she was gone, and wept bitterly for the only friend he had had during his confinement in the cavern.

"I jist know Miss Lilly's a-dyin' to see Christopher!" Billy exclaimed, as the party left the cavern, after being convinced there was nothing to be gained by a longer stay. "It'll tickle her nigh about into fits."

Rackstraw was equally jubilant; for, even though he had abandoned all hope of ever being able to call Lilly Lilac his wife, he still was pleased by anything that was calculated to give her pleasure.

But a frown chased away the smile, when the voice of Uncle Steve sounded, demanding, in real glee:

"Got the boy, eh! Egad, that's good! An' raked in about the hull caboodle of the scoundrels!"

Uncle Steve had joined the detectives outside and pushed his way into the tunnel to meet the other members of the Columbian Quartette.

"Miss Lilly 'll be that pleased that she won't hardly know herself!" Uncle Steve continued, rubbing his hands, joyously.

Rackstraw could stand no more, but fell to the rear, and walked on in gloomy thought, wishing he was in the lake, or almost any place rather than there.

CHAPTER XLI.

UNMASKED.

MISS LILLY LILAC received the Infant Wonder as one returned from the dead, and wept over him and laughed over him at one and the same time as only a woman can. Her cup of joy was full and running over.

But there was something else that was exciting Miss Lilly, as might have been observed, had any one thought to pay particular attention to her.

She kept her eyes on Uncle Steve, and at the first opportunity drew him into conversation.

"You didn't bring the boy back to me!" she declared, shaking a finger reprovingly at him. "You told me you would, but you see you didn't!"

"I done my best," Uncle Steve remonstrated, "an' when a man does his best, what more would ye have him do?"

"Probably nothing! But I'm afraid you didn't do all you could have done. No Dakota farm for me, Uncle Steve! I guess I'll have to stay in Chicago."

"Sho! think over it!" he urged, pulling at his beard. "Think over it. Why, confound it, if I couldn't find the boy, I couldn't find him. I'm willin' to make it all right in any way you ask, but—"

Lilly shook her head negatively.

Uncle Steve was uneasy and shifted in his chair.

Below, the officers were jollifying over the events of the night; but Chicago Charlie and the captain of the launch, with one or two others, were on deck, strolling about, talking earnestly.

Yes, and Jack Rackstraw was there, though he had retired to a quiet corner, that he might not witness the conversation between Lilly and Uncle Steve.

A miserable man was Jack Rackstraw, in spite of the victory of the night!

"Think over it!" Uncle Steve again urged; and he got up and walked nervously toward the rail.

Lilly Lilac saw that Chicago Charlie and the captain were but a yard or two away.

She let the Infant Wonder slide to the deck, and, with a bound, was at Uncle Steve's side.

He started.

"You skeert me!" he nervously declared.

"Did I? Well, you must forgive me. I've thought of something! If you'll walk this way, I'll tell you what it is!"

Uncle Steve hesitated for a moment, glancing curiously into her smiling face, then turned about.

Jack Rackstraw saw it all, and his heart groaned under its burden.

"It's this!" Lilly clutched him eagerly by the arm.

At the same moment, she reached up and plucked fiercely at his grayish beard.

They were almost in contact with Chicago Charlie and the captain.

"Help!" she screamed, grasping Uncle Stephen firmly by the arm. "Help! Help!"

He lifted a hand and struck her, and tried to wrench away.

But, Chicago Charlie, at that cry, had sprung to her assistance; and the captain adding his strength to theirs, Uncle Steve was hurled, struggling, to the deck!

The grayish beard, which had so long played its part, was in Miss Lilly's hand.

And Uncle Stephen Mayfield was revealed as none other than Captain Clover; for the big beard and other disguises used by Clover were found in his pockets!

It was a bewildering surprise—bewildering to all save Lilly Lilac.

Rackstraw had also rushed forward at the call for help; and, now, at this revelation, stood dazed and puzzled, not knowing what to say or think.

Lilly Lilac was trembling like a leaf; and Clover, seeing that subterfuges and lies would no longer serve him, was swearing like a trooper—or, like Captain Clover!

Rackstraw stood with open mouth, as Lilly Lilac smilingly approached him.

"Jack! You dear, silly, old goose! Did you—could you—think that I ever cared for him? For Stephen Mayfield, the leader of the diamond thieves?"

She placed an arm lovingly around the sailor, and whispered:

"I never loved any one but you, Jack! Now, aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

"I'm a brute!" Jack howled, wild with delight. "I'm an everlastin', lop-sided idiot! That's what I am! Oh, fer the kickin' machine! Somebody trot along the fool-killer!"

As he delivered himself of these characteristic exclamations, he caught Miss Lilly Lilac in a crushing hug, all unmindful of the witnesses on deck.

Then he tore himself loose, and waltzed to and fro like a wild man.

How many things were made plain by that unexpected revelation!

Uncle Stephen Mayfield and Captain Clover being one and the same, it had not been difficult for him to attack and sand-bag the detective on the launch, and then mysteriously disappear. It had not been difficult for him to gain access to the Mayfield residence, occupying, as he had done, a room in the house. It had not been difficult for him to escape from the tunnel; inasmuch as he had not really escaped from the tunnel, but had remained in concealment, and, at the proper moment, had appeared as Uncle Steve, the Dakota ranchman. It had not been difficult—But why enumerate?

Shrewd Lilly Lilac had been led to suspect him, and had successfully devoted her attention to his unmasking and capture. She had felt that, in doing this, she must play a part, and that confidants would be dangerous—especially dangerous, as Uncle Steve was considered a member of the Columbian Quartette and in possession of Chicago Charlie's secrets.

So she had withheld information of her suspicions from the Columbian Detective, and had entered on a task that brought much misery to the honest sailor, Jack Rackstraw.

That she had accomplished her mission seemed little less than miraculous, for Uncle Steve was as accomplished a villain as was ever seen in Chicago. He was an actor in no mean degree, and had hoodwinked Chicago Charlie and his associates as they had never been hoodwinked before. It needed the keen eyes of a woman to see behind his mask and reveal his duplicity.

Not only did Captain Clover deceive the forces of the Columbian Detective, but he deceived his own men, as well. They knew him only as Captain Clover; and not one of them—not even Kimberley Ben, who was the shrewdest of them all—had ever thought for a moment that Clover and the pretended Dakota farmer were one and the same.

It had been Clover's plan to keep this knowledge from them, to better insure his own safety. Once he had been caught by a betraying comrade, and this means was provided against a second betrayal.

But Captain Clover had overreached himself. Thinking he was deceiving Miss Lilly, and through her blinding the more completely the eyes of her friends, he had been himself deceived in the worst way.

On the person of Captain Clover were found most of the diamonds stolen from David Davenish & Company. They had been kept in a secret place in the cavern, and had been taken by Clover in his flight.

Only a few of them were missing. These Clover had disposed of to gain money, and they were never recovered.

The man who had escaped from the tunnel, and was thought by the police to be Clover, was Walton, who was captured a few nights later.

Clover and his associates are now "doing time," for their crime against Davenish & Company, and against Sidney Mayfield. Clover's is a life sentence.

Sidney Mayfield had really been murdered, and in a singular way, by Captain Clover.

Clover came to the Mayfield residence, pretending to be an Uncle Stephen Mayfield, whom they knew to be residing in Dakota. They had never seen this farmer relative, and did not think of disputing his claim, and he was thus admitted to the house. He even succeeded in deceiving Barton Brown, who was, at the time, a member of the band formed for purposes of robbery.

Sidney Mayfield was troubled with frequent severe headaches, and, to relieve a headache, Stella Mayfield gave her brother, on the evening of his death, a bottle containing a headache remedy.

This bottle Uncle Steve managed to abstract, and to substitute for it one containing the poison that caused the young man's death.

It was presumed that Sidney, suffering from his headache, had lain down on the lounge, before putting away the jewel trays, and had taken the poison, believing he was taking the medicine given him by his sister.

Stella Mayfield had never been guilty of anything worse than encouraging the attentions of Barton Brown, and from him she was saved by this timely revelation. The knowledge of his true character came as a stunning blow, but already she blesses the hands that delivered it.

As for the Zulus, they knew nothing of the wicked acts of Kimberley, who had made their acquaintance through a familiarity with their language.

The Irish girl, Meg Melone, thought better of her intentions—if they had been serious—and did not press her damage suit. It was even fancied by some that she had been trying to scare honest Jack Rackstraw, and that the suit was only a huge practical joke.

"And we," said Lilly Lilac, referring to Chicago Charlie, Billy Stubbs, Jack Rackstraw and herself—"are THE COLUMBIAN QUARTETTE."

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